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# Journal *of* South Texas

After Emancipation: Cologne, Texas

The Charters of the City of Del Rio: The Making  
and Remaking of a Municipal Government

Corpus Christi's Galvan Ballroom: Music and  
Multiculturalism in the 1950s

The 1864 Confederate Campaign against Brownsville

We are not Tijuana: The Valley Protests Washington's  
Crackdown on Gambling

The United States Military Occupation of  
Matamoros, Mexico, 1846 – 1848

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Founded in 1954 “to encourage and to aid in the development of local historical societies and to discover, collect, preserve, and publish historical records and data relating to South Texas, and with special emphasis on the Tamaulipan background and the colony of Nuevo Santander.”

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## Editor's Note

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This edition of *Journal of South Texas* marks the beginning of a new era in the publication's twenty-plus year history: For the first time in a decade, Les and Cecilia Hunter will not be editing the journal. What a loss! I had the privilege of working with the Hunters while they were assembling last Spring's edition. I was struck by their dedication to both the JST and to the South Texas Historical Association, their perseverance to ensure a quality product, their expertise as scholars and as editors, and—perhaps most important to me at least—their graciousness and willingness to help make my transition as editor a smooth one. What a huge contribution they have made to the STHA and to preserving the history and heritage of South Texas.

This is my first stab at editing a journal. Compounding my inexperience is the fact that I am not an expert in South Texas history (I am the worst kind of Yankee—one that comes to Texas, gets married, and stays!) I currently teach in the History Department at the University of Texas at Brownsville and am, by-and-large, a “generalist” in U.S. History with a research interest in federal Indian policy.

This edition of the JST has a new look and a slightly different organization than what you may be accustomed to seeing. I suspect that there will be a degree of tinkering with subsequent issues to fix problems and enhance its overall presentation. If you have suggestions about what we can do to continue Les and Cecilia's efforts at improving the overall quality of the journal, please let me know—you can email me at [JST@UTB.EDU](mailto:JST@UTB.EDU)

The six articles in this volume deal with topics ranging from the Mexican-American War to Prohibition-era border crossing restrictions to the current municipal government of Del Rio, Texas. We are always looking for new material (big hint!) If you are working on an article or paper dealing with some aspect of South Texas or Northern Mexico (or know someone who is), please consider sending it to the JST. I also need STHA members willing to be reviewers (both for books and for JST articles). Let me know if you are interested.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as editor of the *Journal of South Texas*. I'll do my best to produce a publication we can all take pride in.

Sincerely,

Tom Britten

Editor

University of Texas at Brownsville

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## Corpus Christi's Galvan Ballroom: Music and Multiculturalism in the 1950s

David Louzon

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*Constructed in 1950, the Galvan Ballroom became a popular venue for public and private dances and other social events in Corpus Christi, Texas. Although the ballroom was “home” to the Galvan Orchestra, it also hosted a broad array of local and nationally prominent musicians and bands ( such as Tommy Dorsey and Duke Ellington). The Galvan Orchestra’s repertoire of jazz, swing, and popular “Big Band” music, along with the Galvan family’s desire to bring the “best” jazz and swing bands to South Texas—regardless of their racial or ethnic composition—made the Galvan Ballroom a harbinger of multiculturalism.*

Relatively few of Corpus Christi’s more historically important cultural landmarks remain intact today. North Beach, which once teemed with arcades and pedestrian traffic, the municipal fishing pier, the salt-water swimming pool, and the Ferris wheel, are gone or so altered that they no longer hold the same significance. One exception to this dearth of historical sites, however, is Corpus Christi’s Galvan Ballroom. Built in 1950 by Rafael Galvan, Sr., the ballroom represents a Mexican American family’s contribution to the city’s culture in the post World War II era and it serves as an example of multiculturalism within the city.

During its early years, the Galvan Ballroom, like similar establishments in urban areas of the South, transcended legal restrictions on segregation and provided Corpus Christi residents with opportunities for a limited mixture of race, ethnicity, and class. The ballroom fostered the growth of a multicultural community in three ways. First, it provided a meeting place for Hispanics, blacks, and Anglos. The Galvan Orchestra, meanwhile, composed of Rafael Galvan’s four sons, provided a repertoire of African American influenced jazz and swing

music that promoted cultural pluralism and tolerance between Corpus Christi's various racial and ethnic groups. Finally, the ballroom show-cased major bands of differing races and nationalities, which bestowed South Texas music lovers with a broader spectrum of multicultural entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

The above-mentioned three elements provided a catalyst for cultural exchange. Historian Louis Erenberg observed the centrality of black musicians within "the lives of white fans, how jazz clubs became interracial settings, and how the black musicians stood as bohemian alternatives to a narrowing middle-class world."<sup>2</sup> The example of the Galvan Ballroom strongly suggests that Erenberg's theory held true in Corpus Christi. The ballroom and the African American-inspired music played there accelerated Corpus Christi's ability to transition from legal segregation to multicultural acceptance. The music itself played just as important a role. Jazz and swing, according to historian Anthony Macías, resisted "social segregation and highbrow reification by fostering contact and comprehension, as well as musical and physical expression, in public spaces."<sup>3</sup> As one of those public spaces, the Galvan Ballroom allowed Anglo American and Mexican American audiences to hear African American music, to see professional black musicians, and to experience and appreciate a small segment of their culture.

Married in 1919, Rafael Galvan Sr. and his wife Virginia raised a large and close-knit family. They reared five girls: Beatrice, Rosa, Patty, Mamie, and Virginia, and four boys Ralph, Sammy, Eddie, and Bobby.<sup>4</sup> A career police officer and long-time businessman, Galvan knew the importance of keeping his nine children busy after school. In the early 1930's, he hired Bernabe Alvarado, a local music instructor, to walk his young children home and provide them with music lessons.<sup>5</sup> For three hours each evening, therefore, Alvarado tutored the Galvan children.<sup>6</sup> Many years later, youngest son Bobby remembered these lessons vividly and best summed up their effect by noting that he and his siblings became "fanatics about music." They practiced and performed together regularly as a family. They played at home, in school, at social gatherings, and at local clubs. Sammy and Ralph even performed while serving in the military during the Second World War.<sup>7</sup>

As young musicians, the Galvan brothers enjoyed many opportunities to share their talent. Starting in their early teens, Ralph and Eddie played at area nightspots and at events with the locally renowned Jake Stephens' Orchestra. However, one December evening in 1946 while playing at the popular *Riviera* Club, Stephens notified his band members they would have to play longer hours for less money than their current \$65 a week salary. Consequently, Ralph and Eddie gave two weeks notice. That night, the two brothers returned home and reluctantly informed their father what had transpired. According to Ralph, the eldest son, their father supported their decision, telling his boys he had anticipated the day they would quit to form their own orchestra. He said, "Money

was not a problem,” and he bought them all the necessary equipment and a complete library of musical arrangements.<sup>8</sup>

On January 27, 1947, the fifteen piece Ralph Galvan Orchestra, the largest orchestra in Corpus Christi at the time, performed it's first engagement at the Corpus Christi Civic Center. Playing for the *Mardi Soir*, a Hispanic Ladies club, the orchestra's repertoire included both American and Latin American music. This occasion was just the beginning. The Galvan Orchestra later played all over South Texas for high school dances, proms, private clubs, and public dances. According to Ralph Galvan, that January evening in 1947 represented a “culmination of his [father's] dream to keep his family together” in Corpus Christi.<sup>9</sup>



*Ralph and Eddie Galvan performing with Jake Stephens, circa 1950s. Pictured from left to right: Jake Stephens, Ralph, and Eddie Galvan. Rafael, Sr. and Virginia Galvan Family Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library.*

Three years later, Galvan, Sr., who owned numerous rental properties in the area including homes, a grocery store, restaurant, pharmacy, a movie house, and the Laguna Fish and Oyster Company, decided to open a ballroom to provide a permanent venue for his sons. Aware of their ability and growing popularity, and worried that another band might lure them away from South Texas, the ballroom secured their commitment to Corpus Christi and to their large family. No longer would they have to work for someone else in possibly distant locales. “Mr. Galvan wanted his sons to be good musicians, but not necessarily to leave with a traveling orchestra,” recalled local jazz musician Eddie Olivares.<sup>10</sup> How-

ever, the ballroom's opening was significant to more than just the Galvan family. It provided a lasting contribution to the city of Corpus Christi as well.

The Galvan Ballroom opened March 2, 1950, with a performance by the Galvan Orchestra.<sup>11</sup> This represented a dream come true for the family.<sup>12</sup> One month later, on March 30, the ballroom's grand opening featured nationally known musician Tommy Dorsey—the “Sentimental Gentlemen of Swing—and his equally famous orchestra.”<sup>13</sup> The place filled quickly, Ralph Galvan recalled, even to the point where they had to turn hundreds of customers away. Those lucky enough to gain entry enjoyed an evening of fabulous music, and Galvan estimated that the audience was composed of a fifty-fifty split between Mexican and Anglo Americans.<sup>14</sup>

According to Eddie Olivares, “without a doubt, the Galvan Ballroom was one of the most well known ballrooms for big band music.”<sup>15</sup> But the local paper, the *Corpus Christi Caller*, made only passing reference to the opening, even though it debuted with both the Galvan Orchestra and Tommy Dorsey.<sup>16</sup> On April 2, 1950, a small article appeared mentioning the upcoming appearance of Gene Krupa. The article mentioned the ballroom's grand opening with Tommy Dorsey, but focused attention on the fact that limited space had forced the Galvans to turn hundreds of customers away.<sup>17</sup> The *Caller's* uneven coverage suggested that either shoddy reporting or racial bias existed within the editorial staff of the local paper.

The Galvan Ballroom quickly developed into an important social spot for Hispanic, Anglo, and even black residents of Corpus Christi. It accommodated private gatherings (i.e. social club dances, wedding receptions, *quinceañeras*) and public activities like dancing on Sunday nights. During the Sunday night dances, the Galvan Orchestra or other local bands played primarily American music, but the ballroom also hosted big name Mexican and *Tejano* bands—a veritable multicultural pallet of music. Though not open to African American patrons, black bands did perform for guests at the ballroom and African American groups could rent the ballroom for black-only events.

Louis Erenberg's two books, *Steppin' Out* and *Swinging the Dream*, provide important context for an examination of the Galvan Ballroom. *Steppin' Out* examines nightlife culture in New York City. Erenberg demonstrates how the various elements of music and location (i.e. cabarets, ballrooms, restaurants, and theaters) “fit together and helped to create a 20<sup>th</sup> century popular culture with norms acceptable for a large and diverse audience.”<sup>18</sup> He argues that a real revolution occurred in 1912 when dancing changed following the introduction of more and more African American inspired dances. During the early years of the new century, Erenberg maintains, Anglo Americans “began to reevaluate the role of blacks in entertainment, adapting more of black music and dance for their own.”<sup>19</sup> No longer centered on specific steps and conformity, dancing, instead, focused on rhythm. Where chaperones and parents traditionally

monitored private dances closely, young people of the 1920s experienced more personal independence and social freedom.<sup>20</sup>

Erenberg's second work, *Swinging the Dream*, takes the reader from the 1920s to the 1950s, discussing the rise of swing and the importance of African American-inspired music such as jazz. According to Erenberg, music and dance portrayed the "cultural and gender crisis of the day." Of course, the Great Depression provided the crisis. The introduction of swing and the jitterbug, Erenberg maintains, mirrored society's struggle with the depression and subsequent mobilization for war.<sup>21</sup> Music, Erenberg suggests, provided people with an opportunity to break away from a "depersonalized and restrictive modern world."<sup>22</sup>

Erenberg's thesis appears to reflect the history of the Galvan Ballroom. The four Galvan brothers found inspiration in the rising stars of the 1920s and 1930s. They lived for swing and jazz. Through their performances at the Galvan Ballroom, the brothers shared their passion for music and gave a little bit of African American-influenced culture and New York City-nightlife to Corpus Christi at a difficult and tumultuous time in our nation's history.

However, limits still existed. Changes in taste and in racial attitudes did not occur overnight, but gradually. Racism, especially in the South, provided one of the main obstacles to mainstream acceptance of certain types of music such as jazz and rock and roll. For some Americans, jazz and rock and roll appeared too "African" in nature since many of the leading musicians were either black or sounded like they were.<sup>23</sup> Limits set by racism and racially motivated attitudes still existed in the music world, but not for long.

Duke Ellington's performance at the Galvan Ballroom provides an example of the limits and triumphs of multiculturalism. One of the most prominent black bandleaders of his day, Edward "Duke" Ellington not only led, but also composed and arranged the music for his nationally celebrated orchestra. Erenberg observed, "Ellington showed white and black America that black artists could meet white standards," even playing at annual Carnegie Hall concerts.<sup>24</sup> On Valentine's eve of 1952, Ellington played to a sold out audience of 650 people at the Galvan Ballroom, with about eighty percent of those in attendance Anglo Americans and the rest Mexican Americans. At a cost of \$3.00 a person for admission, Ellington's performance provided a once in a lifetime opportunity for many Corpus Christians to enjoy a national music sensation.<sup>25</sup>

Ellington's visit to Corpus Christi offers both a glance into the city's history, and a demonstration of the uniqueness of one Corpus Christi nightspot. The Galvan Ballroom was unique because it was owned and operated by Mexican Americans, yet show-cased African American musicians and music to mixed Anglo and Mexican American audiences. According to both Ralph and Bobby Galvan, the ballroom brought everyone together, regardless of race, to experience two of the things they loved most, music and dancing.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, the *Corpus Christi Caller*, the *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, and the

*Robstown Record* failed to run a single article concerning Ellington's Valentine's Day concert. The front pages mentioned the local Tarpon Rodeo and covered various musical engagements, though most pertained to Del Mar College and local high school bands.<sup>27</sup> It appears that one of the most popular African American musicians playing in a Hispanic owned ballroom just was not newsworthy. The omission was startling for two reasons: First, the Galvans had advertised the engagement the preceding week in the paper, so the media certainly was aware of the event. Second, the *Corpus Christi Caller* reported on 15 February that San Antonio police fined Ellington in the early morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> while he socialized at an Alamo City club. Though he denied the allegations, he paid a \$5.00 fine for drinking after hours.<sup>28</sup>

While the Galvans welcomed everyone to use their ballroom, segregation rules still applied.<sup>29</sup> Blacks could not attend the Duke's performance alongside Anglo patrons, and a second "black only" concert did not occur. During the 1950s, the majority of Corpus Christi's small black population probably could not have afforded the price of tickets.<sup>30</sup> Yet Galvan, Sr. did allow black patrons and African American organizations to rent the facility for private functions. According to Ralph Galvan, the ballroom offered the only large facility in and around Corpus Christi open to them.<sup>31</sup> Mamie Galvan recalled one incident when a newly formed black social club, wishing to host its first ball, asked Gal-



*Duke Ellington and his orchestra perform at the Galvan Ballroom on Valentine's Day 1952. Pictured from left to right: Willie Smith, Ralph Galvan, Duke Ellington, Eddie Galvan, Luis Bellson, and Sammie Galvan. Rafael, Sr. and Virginia Galvan Family Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library.*

van, Sr. if he would allow them to rent the facility.

Galvan Sr. responded, "There is a segregation law, but that law does not apply to my ballroom. This is my property." The ballroom hosted the social club's first event at a time when most non-black owned establishments in the city would not have even considered it.<sup>32</sup> The ballroom also featured African American musicians, and the impact of their jazz and ragtime repertoires brought blacks into the spotlight as "purveyors of the new music" to Anglo and Mexican American audiences.<sup>33</sup> Intermingling of the races, on the other hand, was not an option for all South Texans. At least for blacks, the law and regional custom required that businessmen adhere to segregation.

Today, one can easily find a place in Corpus Christi to listen or dance to a wide variety of music. Of course, going out today differs from the experiences of the 1950s. The music, the locations, and the make-up of the population have all changed. Most of the original locations no longer exist or have undergone so many alterations they are now unrecognizable. One of the biggest differences nowadays is whom one might expect to meet at one of these locations. While discrimination still exists, one can patronize any establishment they choose. Fifty years ago, that was not the case. If you were Hispanic or African American, segregation limited your choices. According to one local paper, "blacks and Mexican Americans were still excluded from restaurants, movie theaters, and other public facilities in the 1940's. The fight for acceptance and desegregation continued through the 1950s and 1960s."<sup>34</sup> In May 1954, the Supreme Court reversed *Plessey v. Ferguson* and Corpus Christi schools desegregated by 1955, but many private places resisted integration.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, some Corpus Christi residents exhibited a willingness to "let blacks eat in restaurants, stay in hotels, use public swimming pools, see movies, go bowling, play golf, and buy houses wherever they chose."<sup>36</sup> Not until the 1960s and 1970s, however, did the struggle to eliminate segregation achieve much success within the city.

Duke Ellington's Valentine's Day performance at the Galvan Ballroom demonstrated the hardships that accompanied legal segregation. Ralph Galvan recalled that Ellington roomed in San Antonio and had to charter a private bus for transportation because Corpus Christi lacked accommodations for blacks.<sup>37</sup> Ellington normally rented Pullman rail cars to avoid such complications, using them for not only traveling, but also for lodging and dining.<sup>38</sup>

Blacks did not face segregation alone. Mexican and Mexican Americans, especially those from lower income brackets, faced discrimination within the city. The apparent lack of interest by the local papers, previously mentioned, offers a glimpse into racial conditions in Corpus Christi midway through the twentieth century. The Federal Census of 1950 listed Corpus Christi's population at 108,287. Of that number, the Spanish surname population composed a little over half with 58,939 and the African American population stood at 7,101.<sup>39</sup> If there was such a large Hispanic population, why did the newspaper not provide

more coverage? Despite the local medias' bias, the Galvans offered Corpus Christi residents a place where people could intermingle if they chose. The ballroom, just like Erenberg's cabaret, "relaxed boundaries between the sexes, between audiences and performers, between ethnic groups and Protestants, between black culture and whites."<sup>40</sup>

Within Corpus Christi's small African American community, the segregation laws were a constant reminder of their second-class status. Restrictive covenants and prejudicial Anglo American landowners, for example, forced the city's black population into several isolated communities. On the north side of Corpus Christi (at the north west corner of the intersection of what later became High-



*Rafael Galvan, Sr. and his four sons, circa 1950s. Pictured from left to right: Bobby, Eddie, Rafael, Ralph, and Sammie Galvan. Rafael, Sr. and Virginia Galvan Family Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library.*

way 181 and Interstate 37) sat the region known as "The Cuts" or "Cut."<sup>41</sup>

Corpus Christi blacks lived, operated businesses, and found diversions inside the Cut. Clubs like the *Down Beat*, *In & Out Club*, *Hoot Club*, the *Skylark Terrace*, *Club Alabam* and the *Cotton Club* were all located in the Cut.<sup>42</sup> Local as well as big name black musicians played in these establishments—primarily to African American audiences but with an occasional Anglo American or Hispanic in attendance. The clubs in the Cut played African American music, mostly what one long time black resident referred to as "rhythm and blues."<sup>43</sup>

According to Bobby and Eddie Galvan, after playing at an event they would

drive over to the Cut to clubs like the *Down Beat* and the *Cotton Club* to “jam” with fellow musicians. Eddie Galvan recalled, “Ethnic backgrounds played no role.” It was at these informal gatherings that the Galvans really learned to play jazz.<sup>44</sup> “All of the musicians met there. They’d stay open, especially on Saturday night, and there’d be jam sessions,” recalled Bobby Galvan.<sup>45</sup> African American local Jimmie Tryon remembered that local bands played after hours, but so too did famous visiting musicians who gathered in the Cut after performances at the Corpus Christi Civic Center, in San Antonio, or in Houston.<sup>46</sup>

West of the Cut, along what later became the Cross-town Expressway, the Galvan Ballroom hosted a variety of events. Saturday nights usually found the ballroom rented out for private functions. Private social clubs like the Lords and Ladies, the Privateers Dance Club, and the Revelieres as well as Mexican American clubs such as the United Married Couples Club, the Mr. and Mrs. Social Club, and Hi-Fairness Girls Club were frequent patrons. Additionally, the Galvan Ballroom offered a venue for the black sorority and fraternity clubs of the community such as the Alpha Kappa Alpha.<sup>47</sup> At other times, individuals rented the ballroom for wedding receptions, *quinceañeras*, proms, and other social events.

The Galvans also opened their ballroom to the community for special events at no cost. According to one teacher from the old Northside Junior High School, Mr. Galvan made the ballroom available for student dances at no cost.<sup>48</sup> Mamie Galvan also recalled that her father hosted, at no charge, the annual Policeman’s Ball and Sammy Galvan remembered the tradition lasted for many years.<sup>49</sup> Mr. Galvan Sr., offered the ballroom to all civic, veterans, and church organizations, the American GI Forum, and to public schools to raise money for their various needs.<sup>50</sup>

While the renters’ wishes dictated the ballroom setup on Saturday nights, Sunday nights were different. Public dancing took priority on Sunday nights. The simple layout of the ballroom offered rows of tables and chairs lining one wall, but chairs only on the opposite side.<sup>51</sup> Along the back wall, the young men stood, summoning the courage to ask a young lady to dance. “We were teen-agers when the ballroom opened. We girls would sit at a long table facing the dance floor, and our mothers sat across the ballroom from us but kept an eye on us,” recalled Irma Grande in a *Corpus Christi Caller Times* interview of residents.<sup>52</sup> During the 1950s, Hispanic culture mandated that a chaperone accompany young women to public functions. The chaperone served, according to historian Vicky Ruiz, to protect both the young girl and her family’s place within the community.<sup>53</sup> In accordance with an age-old borderland tradition, “courting” took place in a courtyard and in full sight of adults. Chaperonage acted as a “traditional instrument of social control” and a “manifestation of familial oligarchy whereby elders attempted to dictate the activities of youth for the sake of family honor.”<sup>54</sup> Much to the chagrin of the young people, a large

gathering of ever-watchful mothers lined the right wall of the Galvan Ballroom with their daughters, requiring the young men to approach the younger women (rather than vice versa) with their request for a dance.

Not only singles attended public dances, but married couples as well. Both Willie and Anita Rivera recalled attending dances at the ballroom early on in their marriage. To them, the ballroom provided a “neighborly” place where everyone knew each other. The Riveras also remembered the ballroom provided a safe location where they never witnessed a fight.<sup>55</sup>

Low cost offered another incentive for people to go. Women attended free of charge, while single men and couples paid only a small admission.<sup>56</sup> There were other sorts of entertainment available to Corpus Christi residents, but according to the Riveras, the Galvan ballroom was popular with “Spanish people” and close to home.<sup>57</sup> During the post WWII years, close to home meant saving money and gas. However, Ralph Galvan recalled that the majority of patrons still arrived in automobiles.<sup>58</sup>

Social-cultural historians have long been interested in the significance of dance halls. Ballrooms offered their patrons new forms of entertainment and an avenue for socializing not available at home or work. They also allowed for interaction of different races, classes, and cultures in a way not always acceptable under the public eye.<sup>59</sup> According to music historian Charlie Gillett, “the initial reaction of society [to such interaction] was generally disapproving, which served to reinforce whatever rebellious feelings existed among the adolescents, thereby contributing to an identity and a style, which was fostered until, by the early fifties, adolescents really seemed to consider themselves a ‘new breed’ of some culture.”<sup>60</sup> The youth of the fifties stretched the established social norms to create their own identity through music and dance.

The impact of cultural change amongst the youth provided new challenges for their families. In her work on Mexican American women, Vicki Ruiz argues that against their parents’ wishes, some young people strove to fit in or assimilate into mainstream American culture. While some rebelled against tradition or attempted to “circumvent traditional standards,” many also accepted the limits placed on them by their families. When discussing the limits of the Hispanic tradition of chaperonage, one interviewee in Ruiz’ book recalled, “I could care less as long as I danced.”<sup>61</sup> In her analysis, Ruiz found that in all cases where young women recalled breaking with tradition or “circumvented chaperonage,” they worked full-time outside of the house. Women who found employment realized more liberation, took greater risks, and were more likely to challenge familiar norms.<sup>62</sup> Ballrooms, consequently, played a role in the conflict between the older, more traditional Mexican culture and the new North American culture. In Corpus Christi, this change occurred in bars, nightclubs, and dancehalls throughout the city.

Music on Sunday nights at the Galvan Ballroom included popular American

songs played by the Galvan Orchestra, Latin bands, and bands from Mexico and Laredo.<sup>63</sup> According to Eddie Olivarez, “swing” and “jitterbug,” both very popular at the time, influenced the music and dance forms. While Latin or Hispanic bands did perform, American music, such as big band, jazz, and swing, dominated the ballroom.<sup>64</sup> Music and dancing changed continually with new styles and moves. Jazz and ragtime introduced dancers to a “heightened bodily expression and intimacy with their partners.”<sup>65</sup> African American musical influences also emphasized individuality and an invitation to participate instead of watch.<sup>66</sup>

Swing music plays an important role in correctly placing the Galvan Ballroom within its proper historical context. John Rublowksy’s *Popular Music* traces the origins of jazz, discusses its earliest forms, its transition to big band and swing, and ends with its influence on rock-and-roll. Rublowksy argues “jazz represents a synthesis, a coming together of various musical strains.”<sup>67</sup> The term *jazz* first came into use in 1915 in the title of *Brown’s Dixieland Jass [sic] Band*, but probably originated in pre-Civil War era plantation culture.<sup>68</sup> Its use expanded to the rest of America around 1917 with the closing of Storyville—New Orleans’ notorious “red light” district. Fearful of its amoral distractions, the U.S. Navy pushed for the closure of Storyville, which consequently threw numerous African American musicians out of work.<sup>69</sup> These displaced musicians traveled the country in search of employment, and many ended up working in the North. By the end of the 1920s, big band music appeared, but its organization and arrangement stripped jazz of its original spontaneity. Rublowksy argues, “the big band demanded orchestral arrangements written out in advance that were carefully rehearsed before the performance.” Bands such as those led by Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington incorporated not only talented musicians, but also artful arrangers who could masterly arrange the role of each instrument.<sup>70</sup> Swing became the new sound of these big bands and it rose to great popularity in the 1930s. The Galvan Orchestra and Ballroom offered swing music and both benefited from the style’s widespread popularity.

By the 1940s, the more traditional improvisational jazz returned with a stronger rhythm section, “with the pulse that took the drummer’s foot off the bass pedal,” creating the new sound of bop.<sup>71</sup> The return of traditional jazz coincided with the rise of country western music. According to Rublowksy, jazz represented a “merger of white country singing with Negro rhythm and blues, which led to rock-n-roll.”<sup>72</sup> Jazz also facilitated the merger of several separate cultures. African American influences within mainstream American music encouraged contact and familiarity between the cultures, which eventually led to acceptance. At least in the field of music (and subsequently dance), certain aspects of African American cultural expression became more widely acceptable. Because the Galvan Orchestra played jazz and swing, it participated in this important transition in Corpus Christi.

A closer examination of jazz in Texas also reveals a strong connection to East Texas. David Oliphant argues in *Texan Jazz* that Texas musicians played in all major jazz cities throughout the nation. While Texas possessed no single city that can claim credit for major jazz developments (like New Orleans or New York City), Texans still made a significant contribution to the genre. The music they played contained a unique regional style.<sup>73</sup> Early Texans also played a valu-



*The Galvan Ballroom on a Sunday night, circa 1953. Rafael, Sr. and Virginia Galvan Family Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library.*

able role in the development and spread of jazz. Black Texans like Scott Joplin, Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, Henry “Rag Time Texas” Thomas, “Blind

Lemon” Jefferson and Sippie Wallace gave their audiences a taste of music that reflected African American culture. The Galvans gave these early Texas jazz and blues legends a voice in Corpus Christi by playing their music and the music inspired by them, providing the city an avenue for cultural pluralism not always possible at home or in the workplace.

An examination of more traditional sources of Mexican and Mexican American music demonstrate that the musical repertoire of the Galvan Ball-

room (and especially the Galvan Orchestra) did not always fit convenient stereotypes. Manuel Peña's *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* maintains that the Saturday night dances "contained a number of distinctive features that marked them strongly as ethnic *mejicoamerican* celebrations. A deeply felt sense of sociability was present," and these dances fostered a sense of community. While Peña sees music as a clash of cultures or "cultural economics" and *Tejano* music as a form of resistance, none of the interviewees for this work harbored such notions while discussing their experiences performing or dancing at the Galvan Ballroom.<sup>74</sup> That is not to say that they did not see the Galvan Ballroom as a place of strengthening their sense of ethnic pride and community. On the contrary, one couple, Willie and Anita Rivera, attended the Galvan Ballroom because of safety and familiarity, and its primarily "Hispanic location."<sup>75</sup>

Peña's theory concerning the use of music by an "aspiring class of an upwardly mobile group espousing an ideology of acculturation or more precisely, biculturation," fits the Galvans' situation more closely. The *Orquesta Tejana*, which emerged with a style modeled off the famous big swing bands of the era, represented this acculturationist influence most clearly.<sup>76</sup>

Ralph Galvan experienced some of the same musical roots through his experience with the aforementioned Jake Stephens' band. At the time, "Jake Stephens' band was the 'big' band in the area." While Anglo Americans led most bands in Corpus Christi, they used Hispanic musicians because, according to Olivares, Hispanics played best. Local jazz musician Beto Garcia also emphasized the contribution of Hispanic musicians stating, "most top jazz musicians in Texas were Mexicans...We got our [musical] roots from across the border."<sup>77</sup> Within the larger well-known bands, younger musicians seized the opportunity to learn from the professionals. The bands played all around Corpus Christi and the surrounding area. Sometimes, younger Hispanic musicians played for country clubs or other private clubs that according to Olivares, did not necessarily "want Hispanic bands," but were willing to accept bands that contained Hispanic musicians.<sup>78</sup> According to Bobby Galvan, "In the music field you were not judged by your color, you were judged by your ability."<sup>79</sup>

While listings in a local telephone directory are not all encompassing, a perusal through the 1951 Corpus Christi directory found Galvan's establishment the only listing under "Ballrooms." Listings under "Dancing" provided three additional places: *Club Frontier*, *The Round Top*, and *Salon Las Delicias*, while "Cafes," yielded none. An additional seventeen entries appeared under "Recreational Parlors," though none of the entries specifically mentioned the availability of dancing.<sup>80</sup> Other places existed in Corpus Christi for dancing, but it appears the Galvan Ballroom was the only one appropriate for big events. On certain evenings, the Civic Center and the Plaza Hotel offered music and dancing for Corpus Christi residents. Dinner clubs like the *Riviera* and the *Trocaadero* showcased bands and dancing, while the Carpenter's Hall, the Driscoll Hotel, and the

American Legion Hall accommodated private functions. The Corpus Christi Naval Base had an Officer's Club, NCO Club, and Enlisted Club all hosting live bands on weekends, as did bases in Kingsville, Victoria, and Beeville.<sup>81</sup> The Cut also hosted a large number of entertainment hotspots, previously discussed.

The one thing that set the Galvan Ballroom apart from the others, Eddie Olivarez recalls, was that the Galvans brought in "big name bands which hardly any other place did." This statement needs a little clarification. The Galvan Ballroom—one of the largest dance halls in the city—possessed the physical space needed for large performances that many other clubs did not have. Additionally, while the Galvan Ballroom (as well as other clubs) hosted big name bands for private events, the Galvans also hosted them for public performances.<sup>82</sup> Overall, this access to big name entertainers provided one of the single most important contributions to the city. The brothers' talent, especially Ralph's ability with the trumpet, brought them into contact with other well-known bands and with influential people in the music industry. The Galvans used these connections to share music and culture with their hometown in a way others were unwilling or unable to emulate.

Traveling and performing with other big name bands and musicians brought the Galvan brothers not only national attention, but access to artists that may never have considered Corpus Christi as a potential venue. During the 1930s and 1940s, Eddie Olivarez recalled, "people were hungry for jazz music."<sup>83</sup> Olivarez and Beto Garcia proved this statement with their founding of the Texas Jazz Festival—a tradition started in 1955. Within five years, their informal jazz performances outgrew the local college facilities at Del Mar and moved to larger locations as the Texas Jazz Festival's audience expanded.<sup>84</sup> The Jazz Festival provided an annual taste of jazz music to the city, but the Galvan Ballroom provided weekly exposure.

While the music or composition of some bands encouraged an intermingling of races more than others, in 1950s Corpus Christi most residents were not quite ready. In his discussion of the music scene in Los Angeles during the 1950s, Anthony Macías interviewed several Hispanic patrons who regularly danced with African Americans, but noted the interaction was restricted to the dance floor.<sup>85</sup> Neither the Riveras nor Gilbert Garcia recalled intermingling of blacks and Hispanics during their visits to the Galvan Ballroom, although Garcia assumed the presence of Anglo Americans.<sup>86</sup> Ralph and Bobby Galvan both recalled that on Sunday nights in particular one could expect to find both Anglo American and Hispanic dancers crowded together.<sup>87</sup>

Even the Galvan Ballroom building itself, located at 1632 Agnes Street, featured a multicultural mixture of architecture. Galvan, Sr. commissioned his son Ralph to tell the architect, E.E. Hammond, just what he wanted. With a façade replicating the famous Lichtenstein Building (one of the city's finest shopping establishments), and a ballroom and stage patterned after the Balinese Ballroom

in Galveston Texas, the Galvan Ballroom drew wide attention.<sup>88</sup> A place of beauty, both Eddie Olivarez and Gilbert Garcia remember the impact of its elegance. “The most beautiful thing was the chandelier hanging over the dance floor,” recalled Gilbert Garcia.<sup>89</sup> The revolving chandelier with four spotlights, was custom made and predated the reflective balls commonly used today.<sup>90</sup> The chandelier still hangs above the dance floor today.

Because of the perception that the ballroom was located in the “rougher” side of town, some Anglos and Hispanics inevitably stayed away.<sup>91</sup> According to Ralph Galvan, the U.S. Navy even placed it off limits. Nevertheless, patrons still came in large numbers, drawn by the music, the dancing, and the friendly atmosphere. Galvan, Sr. considered the location important and told his son, Ralph, “this is the part of the town where I made my money, and this is the part of town where some of my friends are.” That part of town stretched down to the Cut. He knew the people in the area, and while most were black, he considered many of them friends.<sup>92</sup>

Trouble rarely—if ever—arose at the ballroom, and Ralph Galvan recalled there was neither violence nor fights. Of course, close community ties and the fact that Galvan, Sr.’s long time police friends frequently stopped by probably aided in keeping the ballroom violence free. Frank Dolan, one of Mr. Galvan Sr.’s friends from the police department, oversaw security.<sup>93</sup> One Corpus Christi resident, Robert Puente recalled, “The ballroom was *the* place you could go and enjoy yourself and not have to worry that somebody would try to harm you.”<sup>94</sup>

To understand the Galvan Ballroom and its impact on Corpus Christi, one also must know its history. Yet the ballroom’s history began before its grand opening in 1950. Instead, it began with the dream of one post World War II Mexican American family who sought to make a difference in the lives of their children, friends, and in Corpus Christi. A study of the Galvan Ballroom during its early years demonstrates that it contributed to the creation of a vibrant interracial community. It offered a physical meeting place for all Corpus Christi residents—regardless of color—and because the Galvans played African American-inspired music such as jazz and swing, the ballroom provided the city with an opportunity to experience an important facet of black culture. Using their music and the ballroom, the Galvans provided a catalyst for cultural exchange. Finally, by drawing in major bands of various races, ethnicities, and nationalities, the ballroom provided Corpus Christi with a broader spectrum of interracial entertainment. That legacy continues today not only with the ballroom, but also within the “City by the Bay’s” rich cultural history.

## Notes

1 Not much in the way of primary sources concerning the Galvan Ballroom exists. The newspapers provided a few articles pertaining to either the ballroom or the bands it hosted. The lack of newspaper references may be due to the lack of an index compounded by the lack of dates. Interviews provided only estimated dates and even the photographic archives, of which two exist, seldom yielded more than “circa 1950s.” The final possibility, the one the author believes most likely, is that the Anglo operated newspapers did not consider Hispanic events newsworthy. To prove or disprove this theory, one would need to make a much more thorough reading of the local newspapers during the 1950’s. Therefore, interviews of the Galvan brothers, Ralph and Bobbie provide the basis for most of this discussion. Both played in the Galvan Orchestra, at the Galvan Ballroom, and at times managed it. Two local jazz musicians, Eddie Olivarez, also a professor at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and Alberto “Beto” Garcia provided insight into jazz and the Corpus Christi music scenes. Finally, interviews of several patrons of the ballroom, not directly related to the Galvans, provided added perspective to the role of the ballroom and the community.

2 Lewis A. Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 235.

3 Anthony Macias, “Bringing Music to the People: Race, Urban Culture, and Municipal Politics in Postwar Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly: Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Culture*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Sep 2004), 712.

4 Galvan Sr.’s first wife died before his marriage to Virginia. Beatrice and Rosa Galvan both came from his first marriage but Virginia raised all nine children as her own.

5 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006, conducted by author.

6 Interview of Sammy Galvan, Galvan Brothers Interview, KED-TV, 20 March 1998, conducted by Tara Walter.

7 Interview of Bobby Galvan & interview of Eddie and Sammy Galvan, KED-TV. Of course as youngsters, Sammy Galvan recalled many times that his young mind thought of many other pastimes, for their afternoons, than practicing music. Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream*, 181-182 & 184. Big band music and jazz did not just influence American culture at home; it played a large international role through America’s war efforts. Music combined the best of

depression era music with a sense of national pride and purpose, which while not directly relevant to this study, does tie into the Galvan family. Just like the numerous big band musicians enlisting or drafted into the Armed Services, both Ralph and Sammy Galvan joined the Army. Not surprisingly, each military corps had its own swing inspired band led by many of the top swing band leaders themselves, such as Glenn Miller's Army Air Force Orchestra. The ones that did not join the services directly entertained soldiers through the "USO tours, bond rallies, and concerts at bases and hospitals."

8 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

9 Interview of Ralph Galvan, KED-TV, and Interview of Ralph Galvan, 19 April 2006, conducted by author.

10 Interview of Eddie Olivarez, 20 February 2006, conducted by author.

11 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

12 Interview of Ralph Galvan, KED-TV.

13 Corpus Christi Caller, 29 March 1950, pg. 7.

14 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

15 Interview of Eddie Olivarez.

16 Corpus Christi Caller & Corpus Christi Caller Times, 31 March 1950, 2, 14-16 April 1950 & Galvan Family Papers, Collection 118, Special Collections and Archives Division, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M Corpus Christi, TX, 118-125.

17 There was not follow up on the subsequent Krupa concert.

18 Lewis A. Erenberg's, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 150.

19

*Ibid.*, xiv.

20 *Ibid.*, 153-154 & 156.

21 Erenberg, *Swingin' the Dream*, xii-xiii & 37-38.

22 *Ibid.*, 52.

23 Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of The City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970), 21.

24 Erenberg, *Swinging the Dream*, 9 & 101.

25 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 19 April 2006, conducted by author, and Jan Weaver, "The Day Duke Ellington Came to Town," *South Texas Informant & Business Journal* (August 1999): 3. This very informative article, written by a Texas A & M Corpus Christi archivist is the only mention found of Duke Ellington's Corpus Christi appearance and incorporates the recollections of Ralph Galvan.

26 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006 and Interview of Bobby Galvan, 3 March 2006, conducted by author.

27 *Corpus Christi Caller & Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 14-17 February 1952, and *Robstown Record*, 21 February 1952.

28 *Corpus Christi Caller*, 15 February 1952.

29 According to one contemporary source, blacks were "barred from hotels and restaurants, required to sit in the rear of busses, [and] denied most opportunities for skilled employment, restricted to substandard housing and to all but Negro elementary and high schools." Arthur D. Morse, "When Negroes Entered a Texas School," *Harpers Magazine* (Sept 1954), 47. A review of the 1958 City Ordinances revealed no specific city laws prohibiting blacks from intermingling with white patrons however, on December 12, 1964, the City of Corpus Christi passed an ordinance specifically prohibiting persons and businesses from discriminating and withholding services based on "race, color, or ethnic origin." *Corpus Christi, TX, Public Amusement Places* (1964) 67-1, 7421.

30

Interview of Ralph Galvan, 5 December 2006, conducted by author.

31 Interview of Ralph Galvan, KED-TV.

32 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006 and Interview of Mamie Galvan, 7 March 2006, conducted by author.

33 Erenberg, *Steppin Out*, 152. The U.S. Supreme Court did not revoke most segregation laws until 1964. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Second Revised ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 181. Woodward wrote that the, “Civil Rights act of July 1964 aimed at racial discrimination in public accommodation, public schools, labor unions, employment, and economic activity.”

34 Danny Goddard, “City Populated by Diverse Ethnic Groups 450 Years,” *Corpus Christ Caller-Consolidation of the Corpus Christi Free Press and Sunday Morning Ledger, Centennial Journey*, (Corpus Christi: Corpus Christi Caller Times, 1983), 99-100.

35 Interview of Jimmie Tryon, 24 April 2006, conducted by author. Tryon, a black man and a native of Corpus Christi recalled going to Cunningham High School in 1955 as opposed to the previously all black Cole High School, blacks had been previously limited to attending.

36 Goddard, “City Populated by Diverse Ethnic Groups,” 99-100.

37 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

38 Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream*, 114.

39 Harley L. Browning and S. Dale McLemore, Bureau of Business Research, *A Statistical Profile of the Spanish-Surname Population of Texas, Population Series #1* (Austin: University of Texas, 1964), 2-3 & 15. Not until the Census of 1950 did the U.S. Bureau of Census attempt to identify “Spanish” speaking and “Spanish” surnamed individuals separately from the category of white. Bureau of the Census, *1950 Census of Population, Vol. II Characteristics of the Population, Part 43, Texas* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), Table 4, page 42-11 and Table 34, page 43-100.

40 Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, xiii.

41 Cindy Tumiel, “H. Boyd Hall led Fight on Segregation,” *Corpus Christ Caller-Consolidation of the Corpus Christi Free Press and Sunday Morning Ledger, Centennial Journey*, (Corpus Christi: Corpus Christi Caller Times, 1983), 53. According to Woodward, restrictive housing contracts, which were private agreements, was one of the most effective forms of segregation of homeownership. It was a practice overruled by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948 but “made relatively little impression on actual structure of segregated housing.” Woodward, 101 & 140-141.

42 Jenny Strasburg, "Jazz Giants: Northside nightclubs hosted kings of swing," Corpus Christi Caller Times, 16 February 1998. Available from Corpus Christi Caller Times Interactive <http://web.caller.com/newsarch/news10599.html> ; Internet, 1, 3-4.

43 Interview of Jimmie Tryon.

44 Interview of Bobbie & Eddie Galvan, KED-TV.

45 Strasburg, "Jazz Giants," 3.

46 Interview of Jimmie Tryon.

47 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

48 Interview of Florence A. Adam, "Strictly Ballroom," Corpus Christi Caller Times, 7 August 1997, People Pg. 6.

49 Interview of Mamie Galvan and interview of Sammy Galvan, KED-TV.

50 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006 & 5 December 2006.

51 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006. A review of photos taken at the Galvan Ballroom in the 1950s confirmed this. Doc McGregor Photo Collection, Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, CC, TX.

52 Interview of Irma Grande, "Strictly Ballroom," Corpus Christi Caller Times, 7 August 1997, People Pg. 6

53 Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 63.

54 *Ibid.*, 51-52.

55 Interview of Guillermo "Willie" and Anita Rivera, 13 February 2006, conducted by author.

56 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

57 Interview of Mr. & Mrs. Rivera.

58 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 19 April 2006.

59 Erenberg, xi.

60 Gillett, 18.

61 Ruiz, 59.

62 Ibid., 63.

63 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

64 Interview of Eddie Olivarez.

65 Erenberg, 153-154.

66 Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 39.

67 John Rublowsky, *Popular Music* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967), 64.

68 Ibid., 64-65.

69 Ibid., 74. Originally, a primarily African American area of New Orleans, Storyville came to be known as a place of pleasure, music, cabarets, and prostitution. It was also here where many black musicians developed their roots as well as earned a living.

70 Ibid., 76-77.

71 Ibid., 78.

72 Ibid., 93.

73 David Oliphant, *Texan Jazz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 2-5.

74 Manuel Peña, *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 9 & 15-16.

75 Interview of Willie and Anita Rivera. Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006, & Interview of Bobby Galvan, 3 March 2006.

76 Peña, 118.

77 Interview of Eddie Olivarez and interview of Alberto “Beto” Garcia, 7 March 2006, conducted by author.

78 Interview of Eddie Olivarez.

79 Interview of Bobby Galvan.

80 Corpus Christi Telephone Directory, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1951. The category of Restaurants did not exist and instead were listed under the heading Cafes.

81 Interview of Eddie Olivarez.

82 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 19 April 2006.

83 Interview of Eddie Olivarez.

84 Interview of “Beto” Garcia. Today, the Jazz Festival held at Heritage Park, still lives.

85 Macías, 705.

86 Interview of Mr. & Mrs. Rivera & Gilbert Garcia, 20 March 06, conducted by author.

87

Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006 and Interview of Bobbie Galvan.

88 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006. Construction on the ballroom was begun August 1949 by O.J. Beck and Sons and was completed in 1950. It demonstrates a Streamline Moderne image of the late 1930s through the 1950’s demonstrating a form of post depression exuberance and great potential; a building in motion. Art Deco architecture represented several things, “a statement of twentieth-century modernity and technological progress,” but also a period in transition. Streamline Moderne further represented a use of new modern materials along with new uses of old materials as well as the use of innovative uses of lighting. Carla Breeze, *American Art Deco: Architecture and Regionalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 9 & 16-

17 and David Gebhard, *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1996). The total cost for construction

89 Interview of Eddie Olivarez; and Interview of Gilbert Garcia.

90 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 19 April 2006.

91 Interview of Eddie Olivarez.

92 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 19 April 2006.

93 Interview of Ralph Galvan, 3 February 2006.

94 Interview of Robert Puente, "Strictly Ballroom," *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 7 August 1997, People Pg. 6 of the Ballroom, at \$150,000.35, was a sizeable investment for a single family in post war America. The Corpus Christi National Band turned down the loan twice due to its risky nature before Mr. Galvan, Sr. secured a \$60,000 loan from the local First Savings and Loan. He obtained the remainder of the financing in small notes, using much of his rental properties as collateral. Mr. Galvan, Sr. paid off the loan in only three years. Interview of Ralph Galvan, 5 December 1997

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Captain J.A. Brooks Texas Ranger.* By Paul N. Spellman (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2007, pp 272. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. ISBN: 1-57441-227-7 \$24.95 cloth)

James Abijah Brooks (1855-1944) was a Texas Ranger. More than simply a Ranger, he was one of the "Four Captains" who brought order to Texas in the late-nineteenth century and helped the state transition to the twentieth. Furthermore, as the author says repeatedly, he was the fastest to make the rank of captain; his rise was meteoric. This is the first full-length biography of Brooks, and it should serve for a long time as the definitive study.

Born in Kentucky, in 1877 Brooks moved to Texas and worked as a farmer, rancher, gold and coal miner, and, after 1883, as a Texas Ranger. For eighteen years he was a Texas Ranger captain. After he retired in 1905, he served two terms in the legislature and fourteen terms as a county judge.

He was an expert gun handler and sharpshooter, tough but fair. However, Brooks was not much of a human being. Aside from struggling throughout his life with alcoholism, he largely neglected his wife and children. He abandoned them for long periods and, when he was with them, was rude to his daughter. His life was his work -- whether rounding up the bad guys, lobbying to get the county later named Brooks, or meting out justice in his court.

But the family story and Brooks' post-Ranger years are secondary in this work. The bulk of the material examines his service in the Texas Rangers. The book deals with cattle rustlers and the cattle-sheep war in Dimmitt County in the Nueces Strip. It covers Brooks' trial for murder and subsequent pardon by Grover Cleveland. It relates how Brooks learned something about the imaginativeness of the press, when Richard Harding Davis got hold of one of his adventures and magnified it beyond recognition for *Harper's Weekly*. There is information about Brooks' involvement with the cross-border activities of Mexican rebels and revolutionaries, and data on his efforts to bring law to oil boomtowns in east Texas. The book also addresses Brooks' role in keeping the Rangers from being shut down late in the nineteenth century.

The research is solid. The author has delved deeply into the right archives, sought out and interviewed the right people, and done his homework. The presentation is attractive, as is customary for the University of North Texas Press. The illustrations could be cut back or deleted with no harm; they tend to be group portraits: Brooks and his company on this date, Brooks and his company on that date.

Brooks and the “Four Captains” were not without controversy, and readers who find the loss of heroes problematic will be somewhat disappointed in this work. The laudatory interpretation of the Texas Rangers associated with Walter Prescott Webb has long gone the way of other Anglo-centric interpretations of Texas history. The modern interpretation incorporates the other cultures that made Texas, not just the Anglos. From the multicultural perspective, the Rangers, including Brooks and the other captains, could be ruthless and arbitrary in imposing their will on persons they regarded as inferior to themselves. The Rangers were products of their times; they were racist and did perpetrate atrocities on occasion. This book soft-pedals that aspect of the Ranger era but does not ignore it. It emphasizes, however, the virtues of Brooks -- his dedication and determination, and his commitment to bringing order to a turbulent area in an era of rapid change. The book is a quick and easy read. And it leaves the reader admiring and respecting, if not liking, its principal character.

**Houston, Texas**

**John H. Barnhill, Ph.D.**

*Lone Star Past: Memory and History in Texas.* Edited by Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. Pp. 324. Foreword, acknowledgments, contributors, index. ISBN 978-1-58544-563-9, \$19.95 cloth; 978-1-58544-569-1 \$19.95 paperback.)

In Texas, a mixture of history, memory, and myth is part of the air that one breathes and the “pure artesian water” that one drinks. The effects of even short exposure can range from an increasingly exaggerated drawl to an overweening sense of righteousness. I can say this because I am a Texan, born in Houston, raised in Fort Worth, schooled in Austin, and, while I am proud to be one, I am also chagrined at times at how Texans are perceived in the national consciousness. I would posit, for example, that thoughtful self-examination is not a trait ranked highly in any enumeration by non-Texans of those characteristics considered to be Texan. Nor would such an attribute likely be much valued by Texans themselves in a similar poll. Witness the divergent reactions to Billy Bob Thornton’s portrayal of a sensitive Davy Crockett in the 2004 film *The Alamo*, cited by Don Graham in his essay for this volume: *Newsday* called Crockett the “country’s first prisoner of his own celebrity” (257), while Texas critic Thomas Ricks Lindley thought that Thornton portrayed Crockett as “a scared rabbit, afraid to fight, afraid to kill and afraid of his public image” (262). This, of course, is not how Texans are. Just watch the news.

The thoughts and actions of Texans as diverse as David Koresh and George W. Bush tend to be greatly influenced by Col. Travis's famous promise to the people of Texas—"never surrender or retreat"—and numerous other Texas stereotypes, including cowboys and the oil tycoons. Why is that? Is it inevitable? How did it come about? Can it be changed?

The contributors to this book apply the fertile methods of memory study to questions of how the general public in Texas has acquired and assimilated its history and the deliberate means by which this history has been created and disseminated. While Bush is mentioned only briefly and Koresh not at all, the collection offers a means to understand the persistent patterns of thought or "collective memory" that influenced their actions. It serves as a powerful corrective to traditional Texas images and myths and, while it is not likely to be read widely outside the academy, it has the potential to shape the rock-like substance of Texans' collective memory through prolonged use in college classrooms. After all, according to the editors, our collective memory consists primarily of "history lessons taught in schools; visits to museums, monuments, historical sites, or public celebrations; and viewing historically themed art, television, and movies" (2). If teachers, curators, public historians, artists, and writers are exposed to the "politics of memory," or, as the editors quote David Blight, the ways in which "cultures and groups use, construct, or try to own the past in order to win place or power in the present" (3), then there is a chance that those ideas will be reflected in their work and will be absorbed by those who learn from them or are entertained (or governed) by them.

The authors range from some of the most established Texas history scholars to some of the newer faces on the scene. Among the former are the editors, Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hays Turner, in addition to Laura Lyons McLemore, James E. Crisp, Walter L. Buenger, Andrés Tijerina, Don Graham, and Randolph B. Campbell. Those in the latter category are Kelly McMichael, Yvonne Davis Frear, and Ricky Floyd Dobbs. The topics range widely as well, but all revolve in some way around the ramifications of those twin peaks of Texas history: the revolution of 1836 and the Civil War. From the interpretation of early historians to the public resurrection of the image of Stephen F. Austin to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the content that appears in textbooks, paintings, and films, the authors' topics explore the ways in which the public memory of historical events in Texas has been shaped, manipulated, and used, and who benefits or suffers as a result.

The essays are arranged chronologically, and the reader benefits by reading from front to back; but all the essays are well written and accessible, and each can stand alone. The backbone of the overarching story is made clear in the front matter. The turning of the twentieth century, which saw the passing away of the last of the generation of Civil War veterans, brought with it the opportunity to abandon a legacy of defeat and humiliation for a future of innovation

and progress. To do so, Texas needed a more useful past to guide it in the new century. “Hence,” as the editors explain, “‘Remember the Alamo’ replaced the rebel yell, at least superficially” (6). State leaders exhumed the body of Stephen F. Austin, brought it to the state capital for celebratory re-interment, and thereby began to fix the concept of the “Father of Texas” in the consciousness of Texans. The Alamo was rehabilitated from a liquor warehouse to a shrine of independence and sacrifice, and the revolutionary and national period in Texas history began the process through which it would quickly supplant the Civil War as Texas’s defining historical event.

The need for Texas to re-invent itself in the new century eventually created the environment that I perceived as natural and inevitable when I found myself sporting a coon-skin cap at the age of five or sitting in a seventh-grade Texas history class in 1962, studying Davy Crockett’s last stand. Nothing about the way we perceive history is inevitable is the lesson of this historical method and this book. Once this idea is grasped, groups such as African Americans and Mexican Americans learn the means to establish their own collective memories as counterpoints to the dominant storyline.

This is an important book in the vast literature of Texas studies. As the editors say, it is a “starting place, rather than a final destination, on the road to studying how Texans remember the past” (12). Let’s hope that the ideas this work generates find their way into the collective memory of future Texans.

**Arizona State University**

**J. Kent Calder**

*Walking George: The Life of George John Beto and the Rise of the Modern Texas Prison System.* By David M. Horton and George R. Nielsen. (Denton, Tx.: University of North Texas Press, 2005. Pp. 257. Acknowledgements, illustrations, appendix, notes, selected bibliography, index. ISBN: 1-57441-199-3. \$29.95.)

Any biography in which the book is dedicated to the widow and children of the subject cannot possibly be expected to be a hard-hitting critique. However, *Walking George*, by David M. Horton and George R. Nielsen, is a worthwhile and needed biography of George Beto, one of the giants of Texas prison history.

George Beto’s involvement with the American criminal justice system lasted for almost forty years, from 1953-1991, with almost all of that time spent in Texas. He served first as a member of the Texas Prison Board for six years,

then as a member of the Illinois Board of Pardons and Paroles for about one year. Next he was the Director of the Texas Department of Corrections for ten and one-half years, and finally a Distinguished Professor of Corrections at Sam Houston State University's Institute of Contemporary Corrections and Behavioral Sciences for nineteen years. During this time period, George Beto was intimately involved in all of the changes occurring within the Texas prison system, including its transformation from one of the worst prison systems in the country to one of the best (p. 120).

George Beto's early life, as told by the authors, is certainly interesting and wholly unexpected. Born in Montana in 1916 to a Lutheran minister, Beto later attended a Lutheran seminary, and then was a teacher and the college president of a Lutheran school as well, both before and during the early years of his long involvement with the Texas prison system. The college Beto both taught at and later presided over was Concordia Lutheran College in Austin, Texas, and that school is the keystone that holds the whole story together. It was the base from which George Beto worked to elect Texas Governor Allan Shivers in 1952. He was repaid with a position on the Texas Prison Board in January 1953.

For the next thirty-eight years, George Beto's involvement in the Texas Prison System would result in numerous advances, according to the authors: the creation of the first hospital for the criminally insane (p. 71); the introduction of high school equivalency education and diplomas for prisoners (p. 77); the hiring of the first black correctional officers (p. 122); the shift from training most inmates in agriculture to teaching them industrial work (pp. 124-126); the change from open housing to individual cells (p. 127); the introduction of a comprehensive educational program for inmates, from remedial high school classes to post-graduate degrees (pp. 130-132); the introduction of pre-release and work release programs to prepare prisoners for eventual freedom (p. 132-133); and a substantial raise in prison guard pay as well as improvements in their training (pp. 137-138).

At the same time Beto was introducing his own numerous reforms, however, he was highly resistant to change from the outside. Beginning in 1964, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that inmates nationwide could bring legal action against prison officials based on the Civil Rights Act of 1871, inmates and their advocates began filing an increasing number of writs against prison officials, claiming the way in which they were incarcerated constituted an abridgement of their civil liberties. (p. 144-145).

Beto, instead of working with inmates and their advocates to help bring about additional reforms in Texas, reacted with hostility, retaliation, and punishment. This is where the authors fall short in their analysis of Beto as the Director of Texas Prisons. The authors only lightly touch upon the subject of Texas prison litigation during Beto's years and his reaction to it, and the most critical observation they can muster about their subject in this regard is: "From hindsight,

one can be critical of Beto's failure to accept the new trends in civil rights." (p. 145).

The authors should have developed this topic more deeply, to explain how a man so progressive in his views on penology could have been so resistant to change and even reactionary when confronted with reform ideas from outside the prison walls. If anyone could have accepted ideas for change from outside the world he inhabited, one would think the Lutheran Minister from Montana running the Texas Prison System could have.

In spite of this criticism, I recommend the Beto biography. It is a quick read, and a welcome and worthwhile biography of one of the most important men in Texas prison history. It is a good starting point for anyone interested in the history of the Texas prison system and penology in Texas over the last half century.

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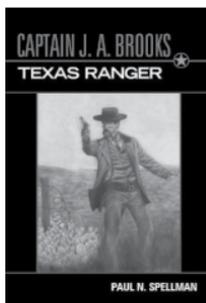
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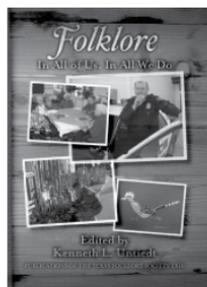
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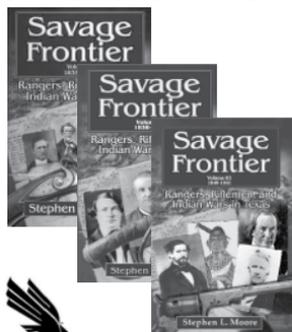
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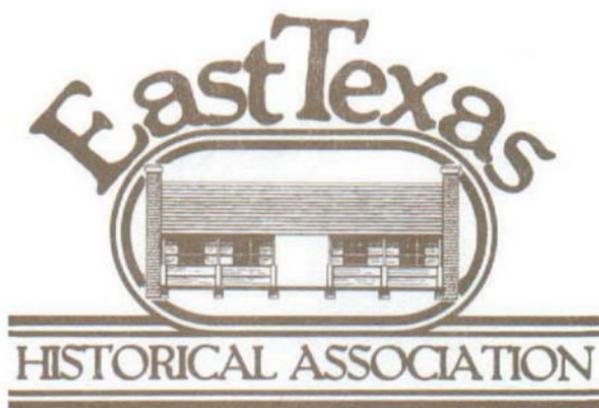
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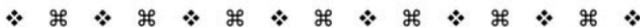
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