

History of the Forts Velasco

Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
Brazoria County, Texas
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History of the Forts Velasco

by Chris Kneupper

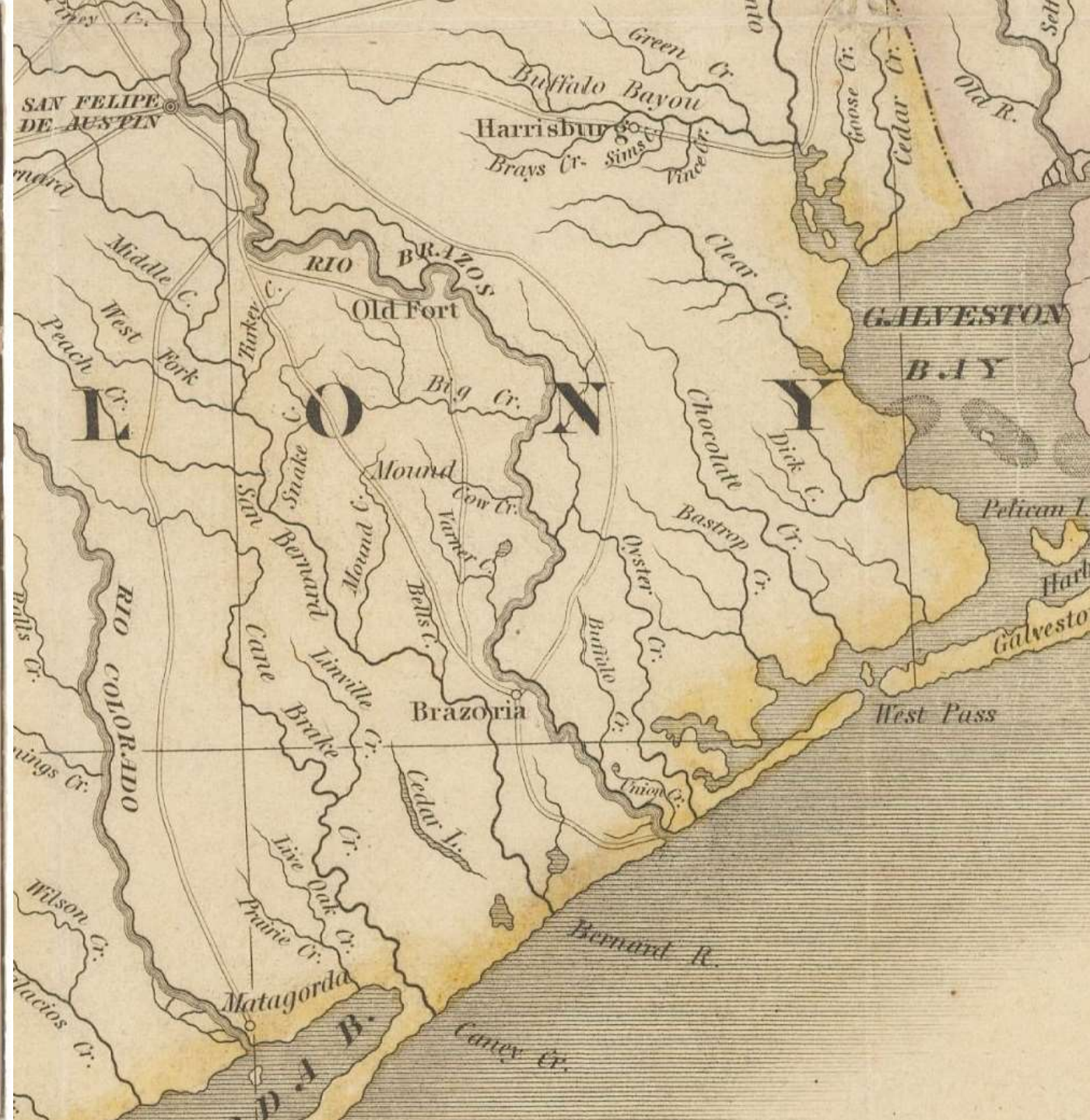
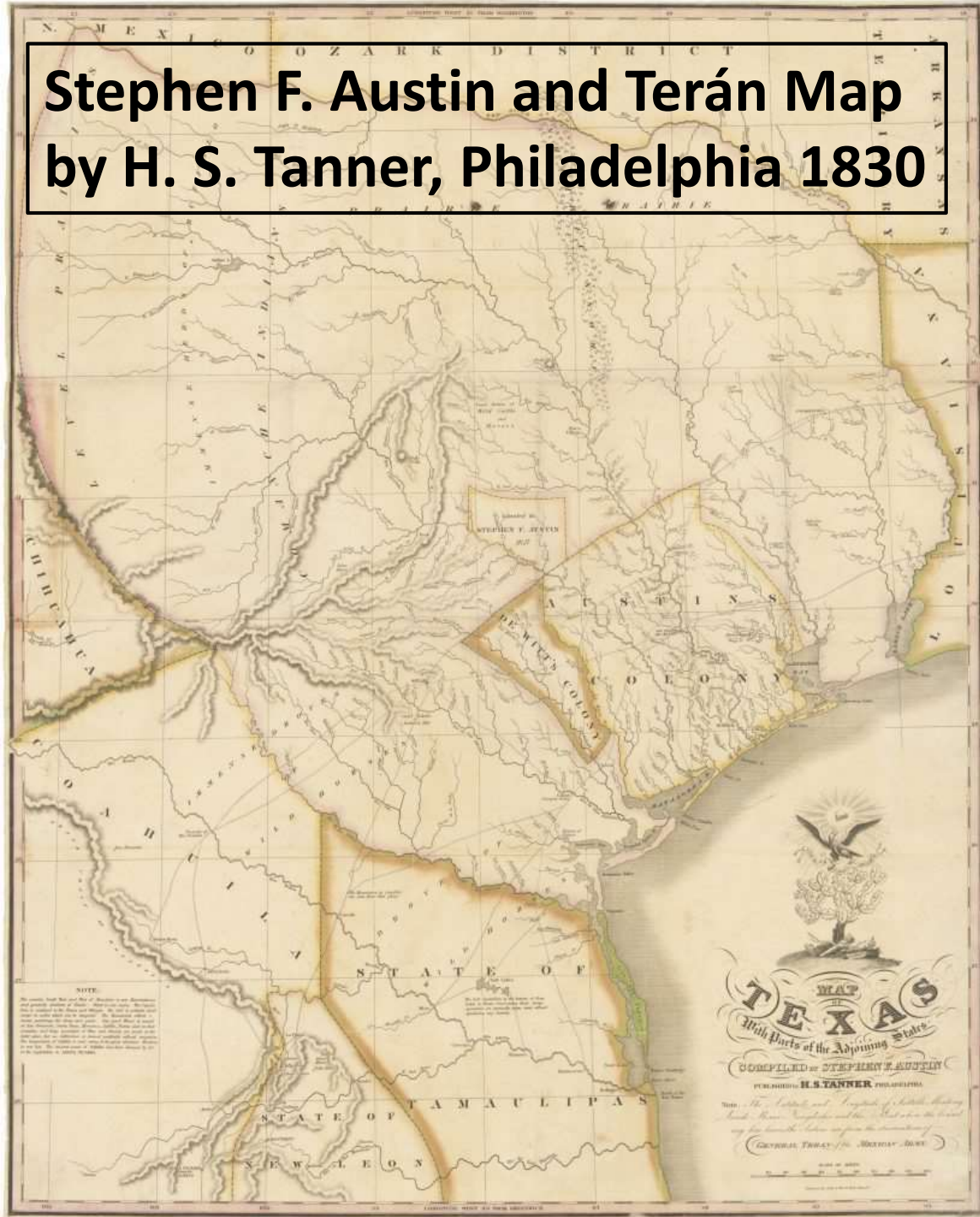
Brazosport Archaeological Society, Texas Archeological Society, Cradle Of Texas Conservancy, Sons of the Republic of Texas, Certified Texas Master Naturalist



Desired Objectives of this Presentation

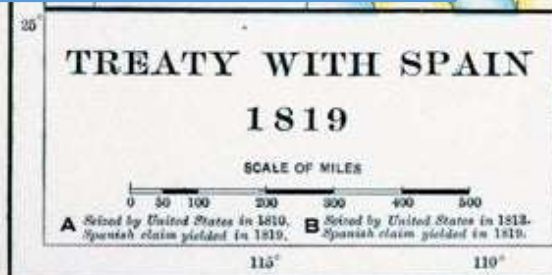
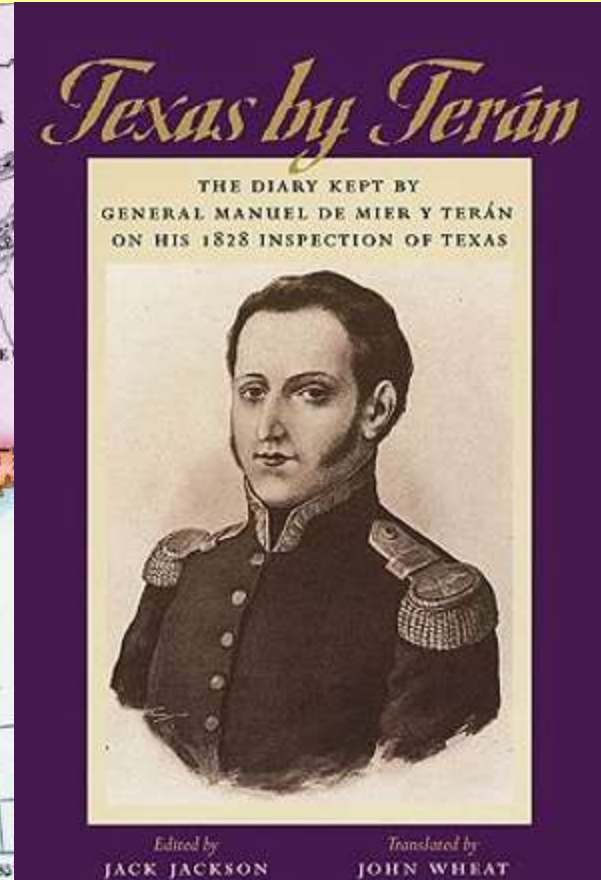
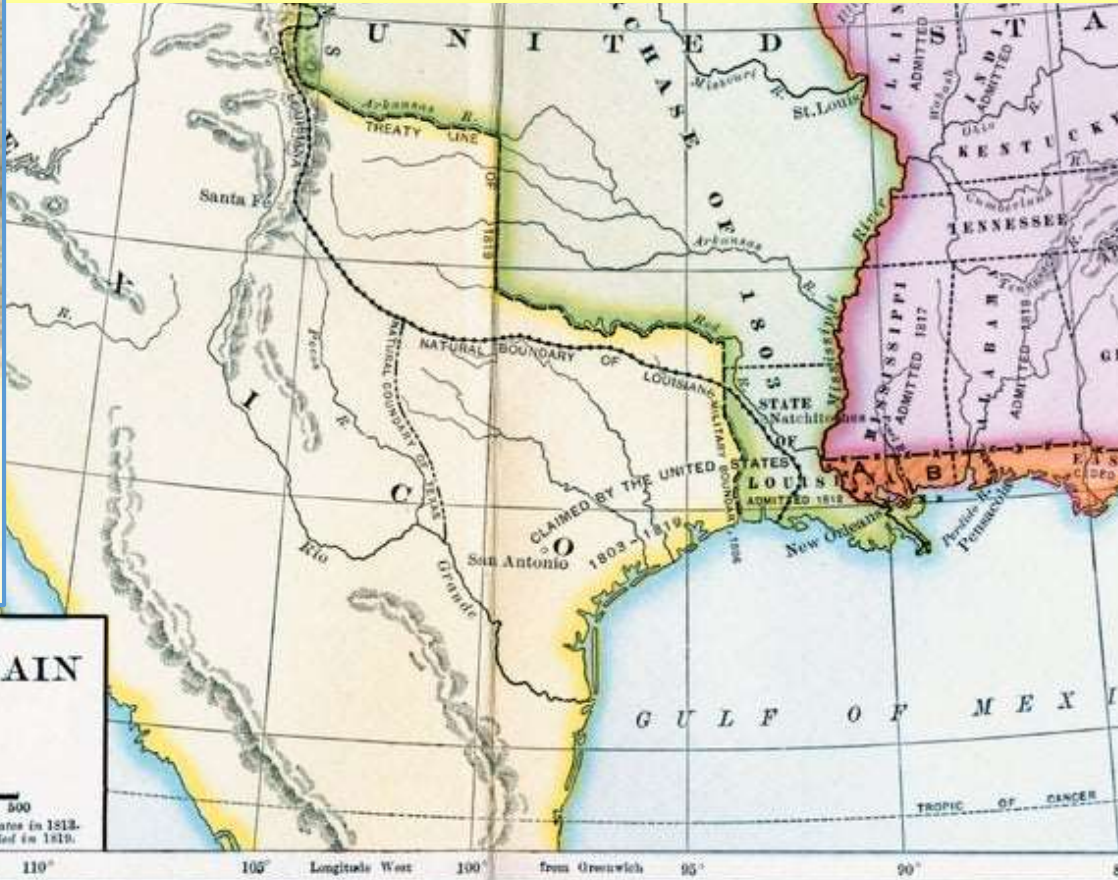
- This is a chronological and archaeological history of the old Velasco area, as an “executive summary” in the form of a Powerpoint presentation.
- The full history as a narrative has been posted on the Internet:
<https://velascohistoryarchaeology.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/1/6/131682501/chronarchhistfortsvelasco-23jul2020.pdf>
- Archaeology is a natural science under the purview of the TMN program, but is not commonly presented.
- Historical archaeology often involves use of archival information, as a preliminary step to traditional survey or excavation activities.
- Old Velasco played a more significant role in early Texas history than is generally recognized today, so detailed research has been done emphasizing primary documents.
- Efforts should be made to redress the situation by historical interpretation of the area, to teach locals and promote heritage tourism for visitors.
- The history of the site can inform and enable any historical interpretation or archaeological projects in coming years.

Stephen F. Austin and Terán Map by H. S. Tanner, Philadelphia 1830



Manuel de Mier y Terán

- led boundary expedition in 1828 to Texas
- precursor to Law of April 6, 1830
- birth of customs post & military fort at Brazos



George Fisher tries in summer 1830 to establish "Aduana Maritima de Galvezton" – really the Brazos



TO THE EDITOR OF THE TEXAS GAZETTE.
Maritime Custom House of Galvezton.
 This day I entered on the discharge of my duties, as Collector of the Maritime Custom House that is to be established in the Port of Galvezton, and the Supreme Government of the nation not having definitively resolved upon the point where the Custom House of said Port is to be permanently erected; and the commerce of this coast requiring the vigilance of the Supreme Government at different points, I have thought proper to establish the office of said Custom House, provisionally, and until the dispositions of the Supreme Government shall be communicated to me, on the left bank of the river Brazos, at its entrance into the sea, and to have a Deputy on the Island of San Luis, (Galvezton) in front of the entrance of the Bay of Galvezton, called *Punto de Culebra*, at both of which places, so soon as convenient, lights will be placed for the guidance of the navigators on this coast, and where the manifests and other documents will be exacted from the captains of vessels, as well as the passports from the passengers, according to the existing laws on the subject.

All of which I communicate to you that you may be pleased to insert in your paper for the information of Commerce, and of others interested in the navigation of this coast.

• *God and Liberty.*
 GEORGE FISHER.
 Austin, 18th May, 1830

CUSTOM-HOUSE, GALVEZTON.
 SEALED PROPOSALS, will be received until the first day of August next, at this Custom-House, for building a brick house at Brazos Bar, of best materials and workmanship, of the dimensions and construction according to the plot, which may be seen at the Post-Offices at Austin, and Brazoria, and at Harrisburg at the store of Mr. Dunlap.

Propositions must be forwarded by mail, post paid, and endorsed "Proposals." Also, for building a Light-House at Brazos Bar, and one on Galvezton Island, according to the model to be seen at the same places. Proposals for each Light-House to be made out separate. Bond and security will be required from builders for the execution of the contracts.

Bar of Brazos, 27th May, 1830.
 JUNE 5. JORGE FISHER, Coll'r.

George Fisher tries in summer 1830 to establish “Aduana Maritima de Galvezton” – really the Brazos

CUSTOM-HOUSE, GALVEZTON.

NOTICE is hereby given, to captains, masters, owners, and commanders of vessels, bound for this port or to any of the waters of Texas, that a Manifest of the Cargo and Passenger List, per triplicate, in the Spanish language will be required by the Boarding Officer of this Custom House, immediately after coming to anchor. The Manifest must specify each bale, barrel, box, package or parcel, with its respective mark and number, describing the quantity and quality of the goods it contains, by specifying the number of pieces, measures or weights of each parcel or package. All goods that may be found on board any vessel, without being thus described in the manifest, will be subject to seizure; likewise all those which may differ in quantity or quality from the description given in the manifest. The Passenger List, must contain the names, nation, age, and occupation of each passenger; also the passports which they may have to enter this country. Manifests and Passenger List, must be signed by the Mexican Consul in the port of departure of the vessel. All passengers brought without passports, will be detained, and commanders compelled to carry them back. The revenue laws of this nation will be enforced against all commanders of vessels who do not comply with the above requisitions.

Bar of Brazos, 27th May, 1830.

JORGE FISHER,
Collector.

June 5

...from
Texas
Gazette
newspaper,
published in
San Felipe
de Austin



... but Fisher
was suspended
by Terán.

CUSTOM-HOUSE, GALVEZTON.

Signals at the mouth of the River Brazos for guidance of Navigators.

FOR the information of Navigators who wish to enter the river Brazos, the following signals will be exhibited to denote the stage of water on the Bar—

1. The Mexican color at mast-head will denote high tide.
2. The same, at half-mast, will be for half tide.
3. No colors, for low tide.
4. The number of feet of water over the Bar, will be expressed by an equal number of white pendants placed below each other.

Directions to cross the Bar.

The channel will be marked out by floating buoies on the Bar, and by a range of white flags on the shore.

These signals and directions, will be given to all vessels off the bar, which may give a signal for a pilot.

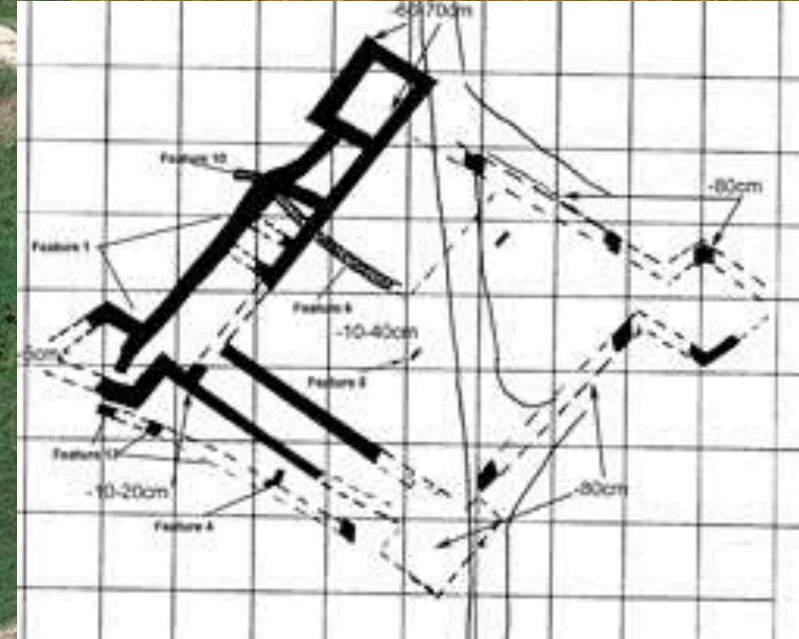
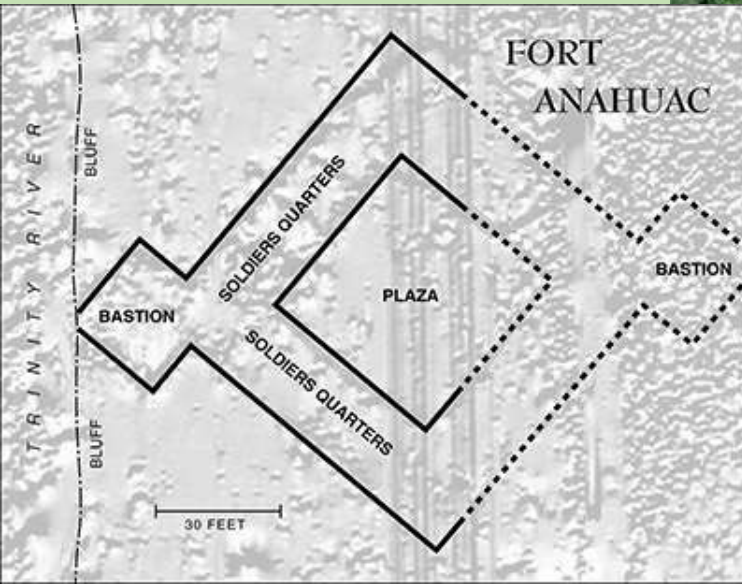
Bar of Brazos, June 1, 1830.

JORGE FISHER,
Collector.

June 19

Fort Anahuac established 1830

- located at mouth of Trinity River in NE Galveston Bay
- John (Juan) Davis Bradburn, commander
- customs official (George Fisher) based here in 1831





Customs Post established at mouth of Brazos River



- Capt. James Lindsay and 10 soldiers sent from Anahuac in early 1831.
- A visitor in Mar-1831 reported ... *There were ten or twelve puny, dark-complexioned men, at Captain Cotton's in uniforms, who I learnt were Mexican soldiers, stationed there to enforce the revenue laws."*
- **Mary Austin Holley** described the post on 22-Oct-1831 when she entered the mouth of the Brazos aboard the ship **Spica**: *"... Here there is a Mexican garrison, and the tri-colored flag is hoisted, the first signal of our approach to a foreign land. On our right, in front of their palmetto-roofed, and windowless barracks, the lazy sentinels were 'walking their lonely rounds,' without excessive martial parade; nor did the unturretted quarters of the commanding officer, show forth much of the blazonry of a Spanish Don."*
- In Sep-1831, Lt. Ignacio Dominguez replaced Lindsay as commander, and twenty soldiers were added to the post in Nov-1831.

Incident with *Sabine* and *Nelson*

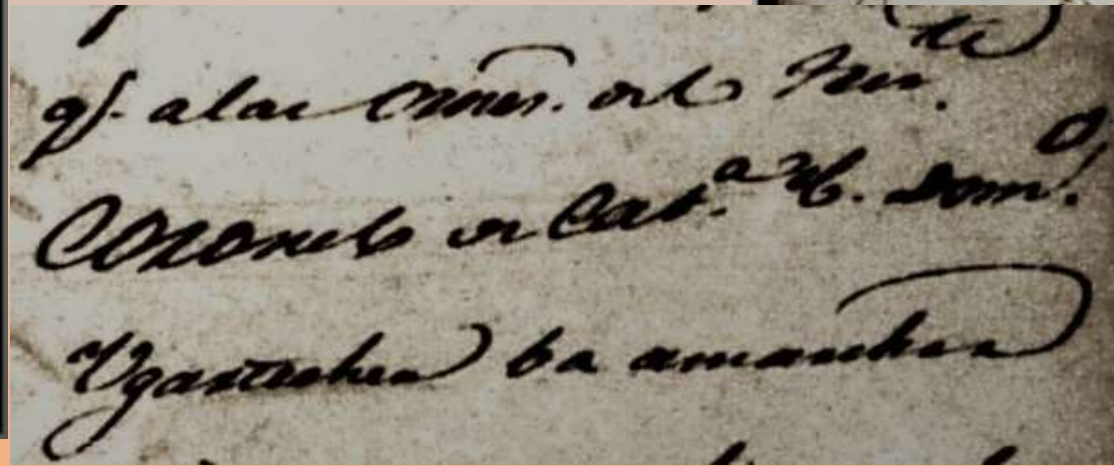
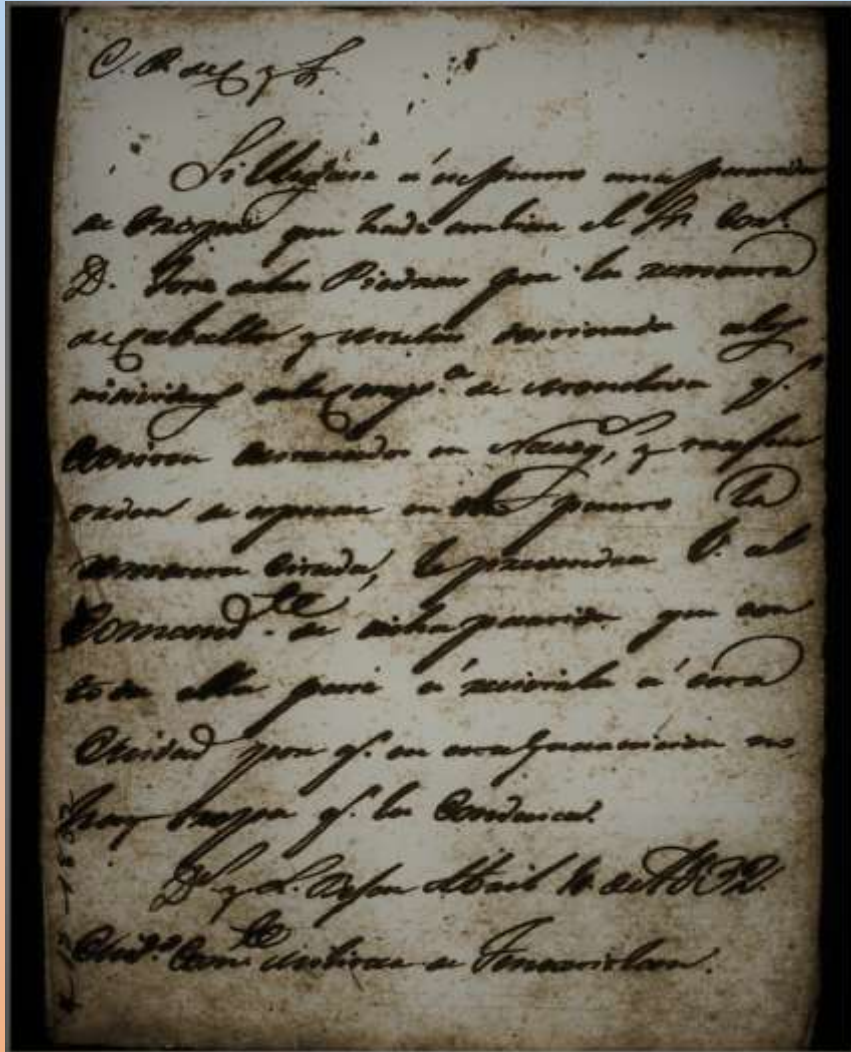
- 15-Dec-1831

- owners Edwin Waller & William Wharton refuse customs duties
- attempt to sail their schooners past military camp at Velasco
- small arms fire exchanged; one wounded on each side



Dispatches from the Béxar Archives

hand-written Spanish; many have not been transcribed or translated





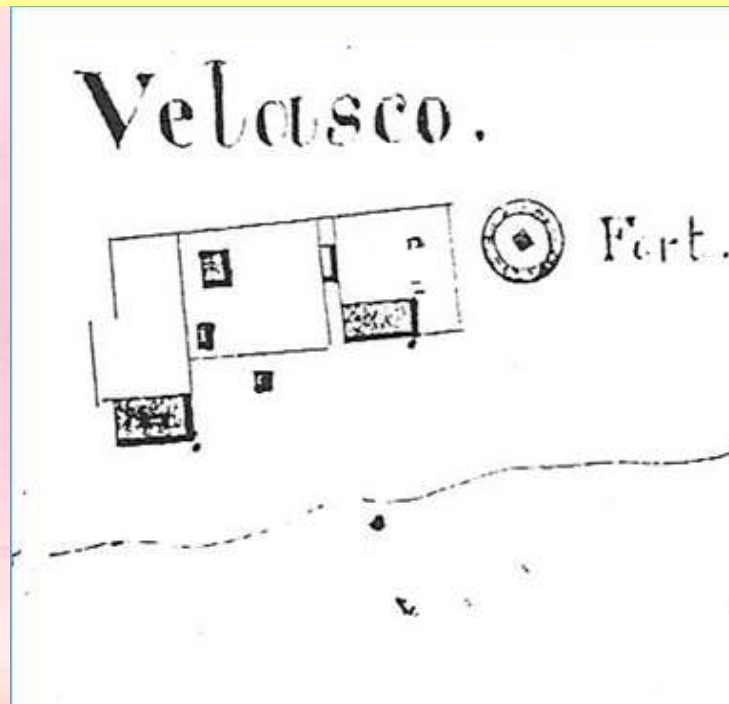
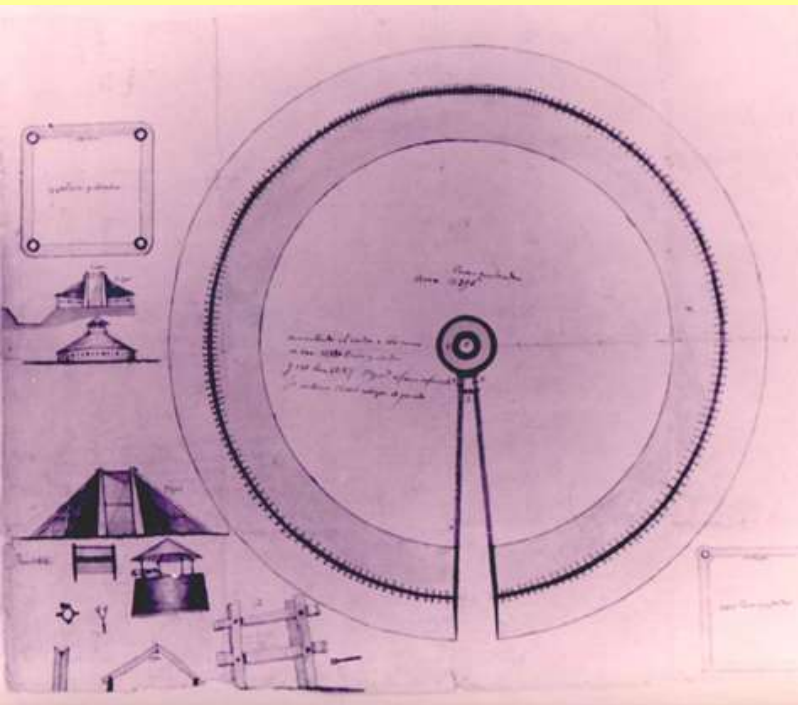
Staging at Anahuac



- 5 or 6-Mar-1832: Domingo de Ugartechea arrives on **Topaz**, disembarks at Anahuac with 86 soldiers and artillerymen.
- Utilizes gunpowder supply at Anahuac to make 100 cartridges for his “**cañón de á 8**”, asking commander of Nacogdoches to replace it.
- 4-Apr-1832: Juan Davis Bradburn writes letter detailing plans for building “Fortaleza de Velasco” – first mention of this name.
- 19-Apr-1832: Ugartechea arrives at mouth of Brazos with 100 soldiers, 17 artillerymen and wooden pickets. **Topaz** grounded on Brazos bar.
- 15-May-1832: Ugartechea writes that the fort is mostly complete.
- 7-Jun-1832: Ugartechea writes that he has trouble with desertions.

Fort Velasco constructed Apr-Jun 1832

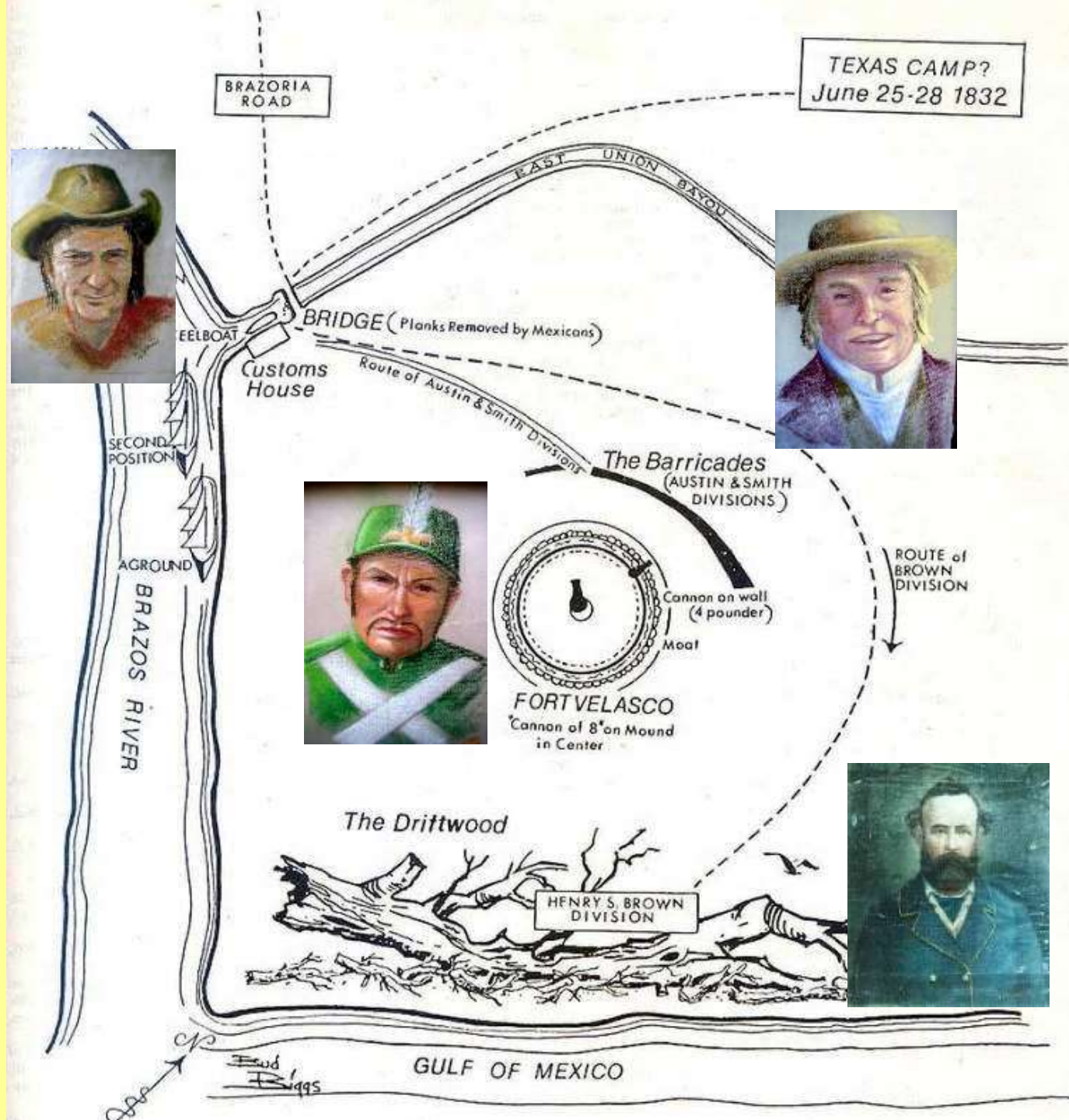
- Lt. Col. Domingo de Ugartechea arrives with 100 soldiers & 17 artillerymen
- circular palisade & central cannon bastion built in about 4 weeks
- Texians have continuing disputes with Bradburn at Anahuac
- John Austin recovers cannons at Brazoria; attempts to sail past Velasco
- Ugartechea refuses passage, leading to Battle Of Velasco 26-Jun-1832
- Texas and Mexican dead buried near fort.





Battle of Velasco

- Anahuac Disturbances
- 25-29 Jun 1832
- schooner *Brazoria* fortified with cotton bales and 2-3 cannon
- fort equipped with 8 or 9# naval cannon and 4-oz. swivel gun
- casualties:
 - Texan 2-23 killed, 2-40 wounded
 - Mexican 7-42 killed, 7-70 wounded
- Mexicans surrender due to lack of ammunition; paroled back to Matamoros.





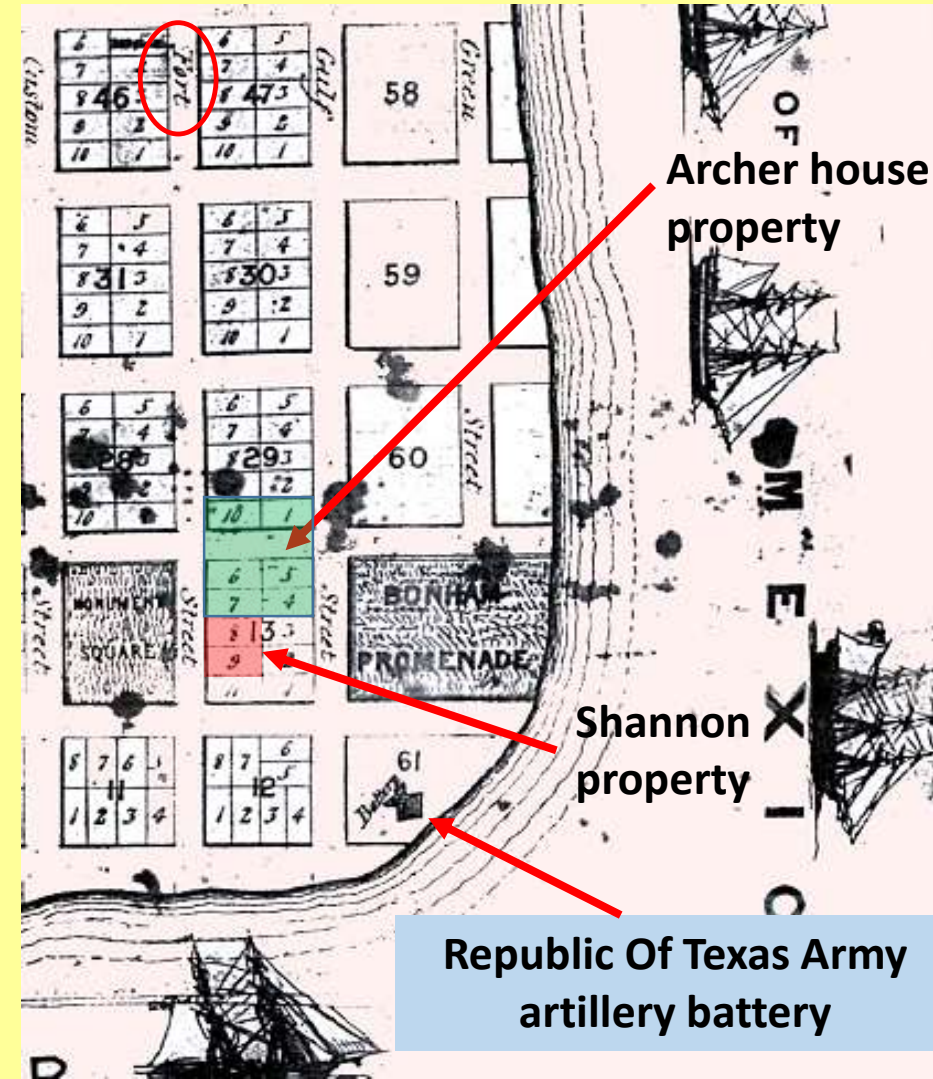
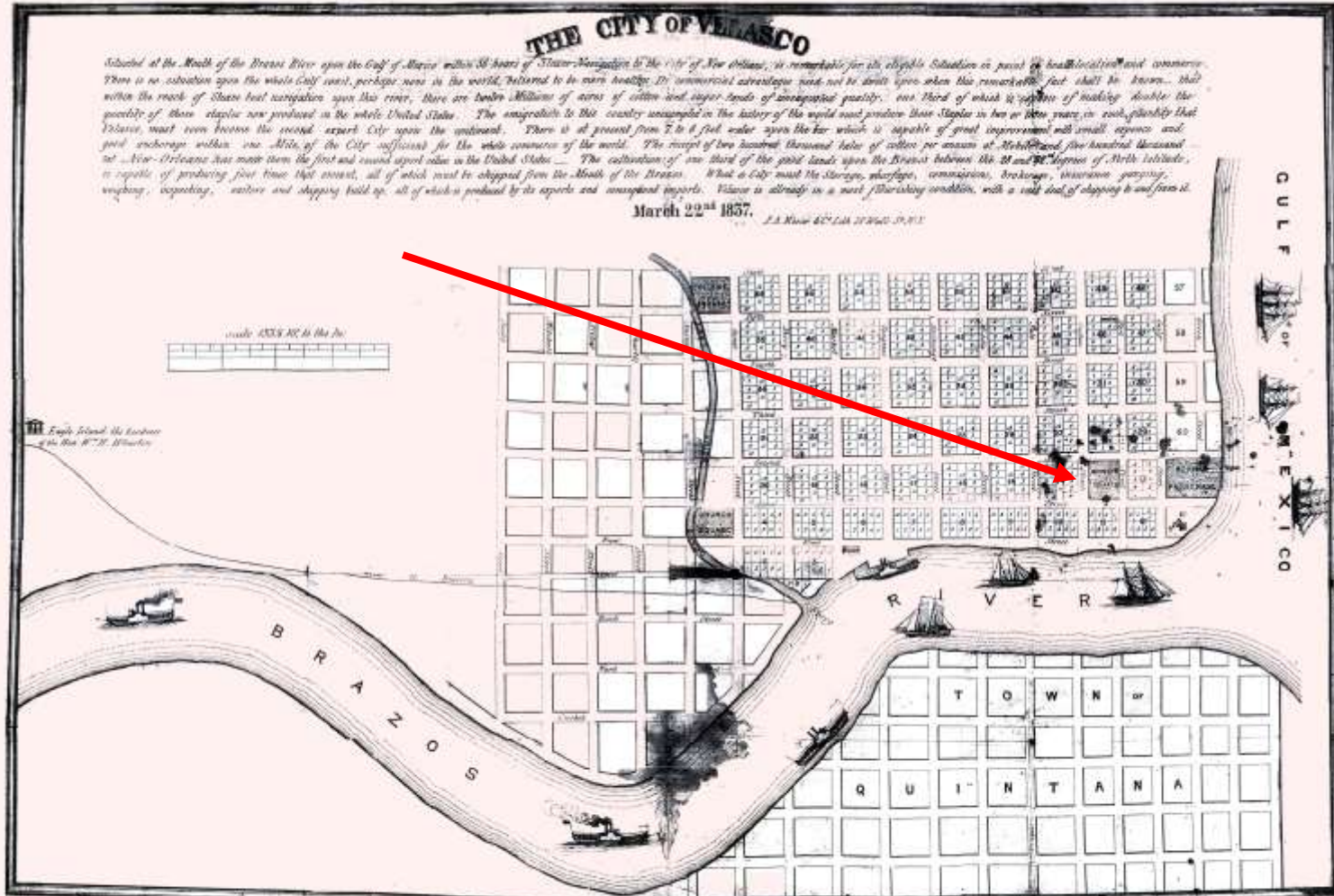
Political Aftermath



- Col. Jose Antonio Mexia arrives with 5 ships & 400 men off the mouth of the Brazos on 16-Jul-1832, with Stephen F. Austin.
- Mexia received warmly in Brazoria; Texians identify with Santa Anna (then revolting against centralist Bustamante) and Constitution of 1824.
- famously, a party is given on 22-Jul-1832 known afterwards as the Santa Anna Ball.
- afterwards, both Mexican and Texian forces accept situation for their own reasons.
- At Anahuac, Bradburn is relieved, and escapes to New Orleans.
- In Mexico, Terán commits suicide, despondent over Mexican politics and his belief that Texas was lost.

Location of 1832 Fort

1837 Velasco plat map shows Monument Square



Texian and Mexican dead buried next to Fort

- **Ugartechea's after-report, 1-Jul-1832**

"We buried five dead later also buried two more soldiers ... near the fort."

- **Arkansas Times And Advocate newspaper, 6-Feb-1833**

"MONUMENT. (to be erected at the Mouth of the River Brazos) to "... those who nobly fought and fell on the plains of Velasco."

- describes granite and marble monument dimensions and inscriptions

- **Mary Austin Holley's visit to Velasco in 1838**

"Gen. Green ... pointed to the graves of those who fell in the first battle for Independence – Looked at the old fort – the work of the Mexicans – Velasco looks quite like a place..."

➤ **So, what is commemorated in Monument Square – the fort OR the Texian graves?**

15-Jun-1833
Notice in newspaper
for
Ball and Oration
“In commemoration of
the capture of
Fort Velasco”

THE CONSTITUTIONAL
ADVO  GATE
AND TEXAS PUBLIC ADVERTISER.

VOL. I. NO. 36. BRAZORIA, SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 1833.

VELASCO ASSOCIATION

BALL.

[In commemoration of the capture of Fort Velasco.]

A *Splendid Anniversary Ball* will be given by the Proprietors, on the **EVENING OF THE 27TH JUNE NEXT**, in the Town of Velasco—to the participation of which, the friends of the Association, and the public generally, are respectfully invited.

By order of the Association,

L. C. MANSON, Sec.

March 9, 1823—25tf

ORATION AT VELASCO.

An Oration will be delivered by B. T. Archer Esqr. on the 27th of June, the anniversary of the victory gained at Velasco, by the constitutional forces, in 1832.

1898 article by Adele Looscan

The Old Mexican Fort at Velasco, The Quarterly of The Texas State Historical Association, Vol. 1, No. 4, (Apr 1898), pp. 282–284.

“Mrs. Ellen A. Shannon, who was born at Velasco in 1841, her parents, Henry C. and Pamela Wilcox, having moved there in 1837, gives a reliable account of the site of the old fort, which, she says, is now marked by her own residence.”

“... Mr. A. G. Follett, Sr., ... who settled at Velasco in 1838, agrees that Mrs. Shannon's house now marks the spot where once stood the old fort. Her house was built in 1887, in consequence of the one previously occupied by her having been seriously damaged by the storm of 1886 ...”

Brazoria County Deed Records, Vol. B, p. 493

Peter and Mary Caroline MacGreal convey to Charles James O'Connor “... ***all that certain parcel of property lying and situated in the Town of Velasco known as the ‘Archer House’ with the four lots immediately adjoining said ‘Archer House’ and not including the two lots near what was called the ‘Old Fort’.***” - 9-Jan-1845

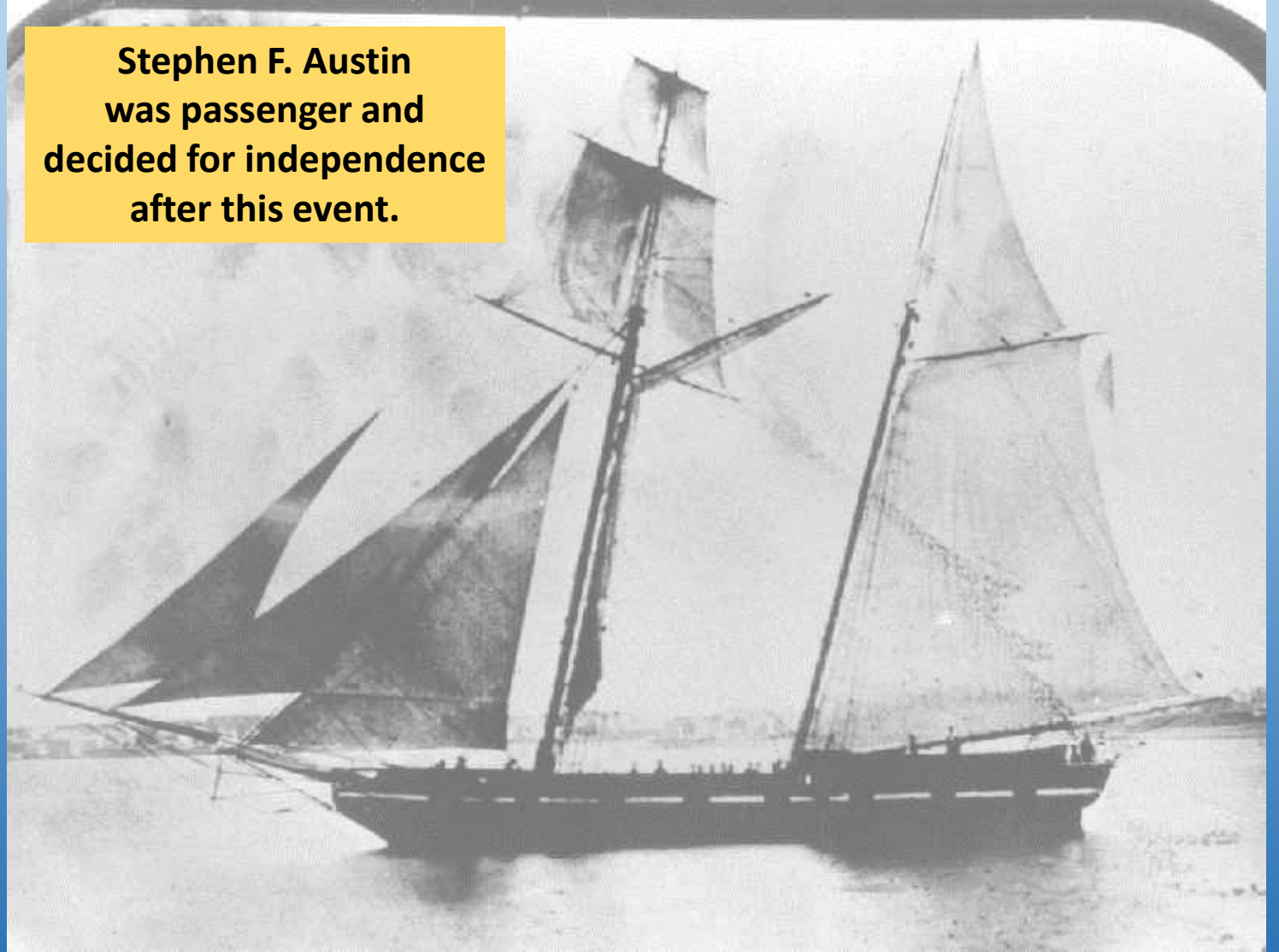
Since the Republic Of Texas battery was located in Block 61, this seemingly can only refer to the 1832 fort. Lots 4 and 7 of Block 13 were on the river side of the Archer house, so may have been the ones not sold, and may be nearest the “Old Fort”.

Lots 8 and 9 of Block 13 were purchased by James Thompson Shannon in 1856 [Smith Dec-2014], immediately adjacent to lot 7.

Laura and *San Felipe* capture the *Correo Mexicano* offshore of Velasco, 1-2 Sep 1835



**Stephen F. Austin
was passenger and
decided for independence
after this event.**



First Republic of Texas Navy, 1835-1837

Velasco was homeport for *Invincible* and *Independence*



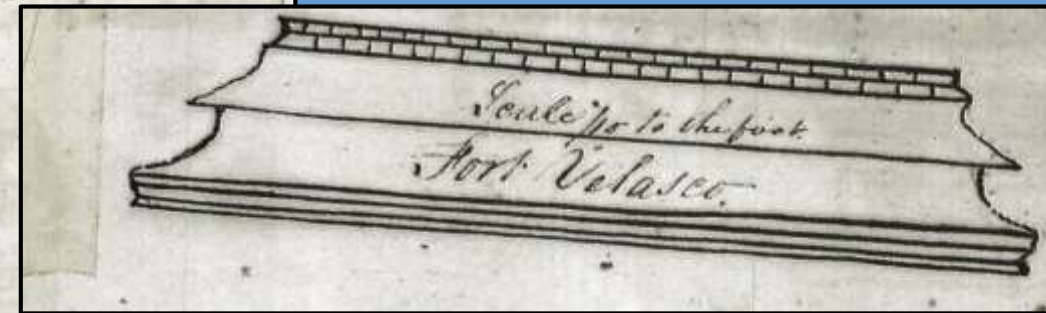
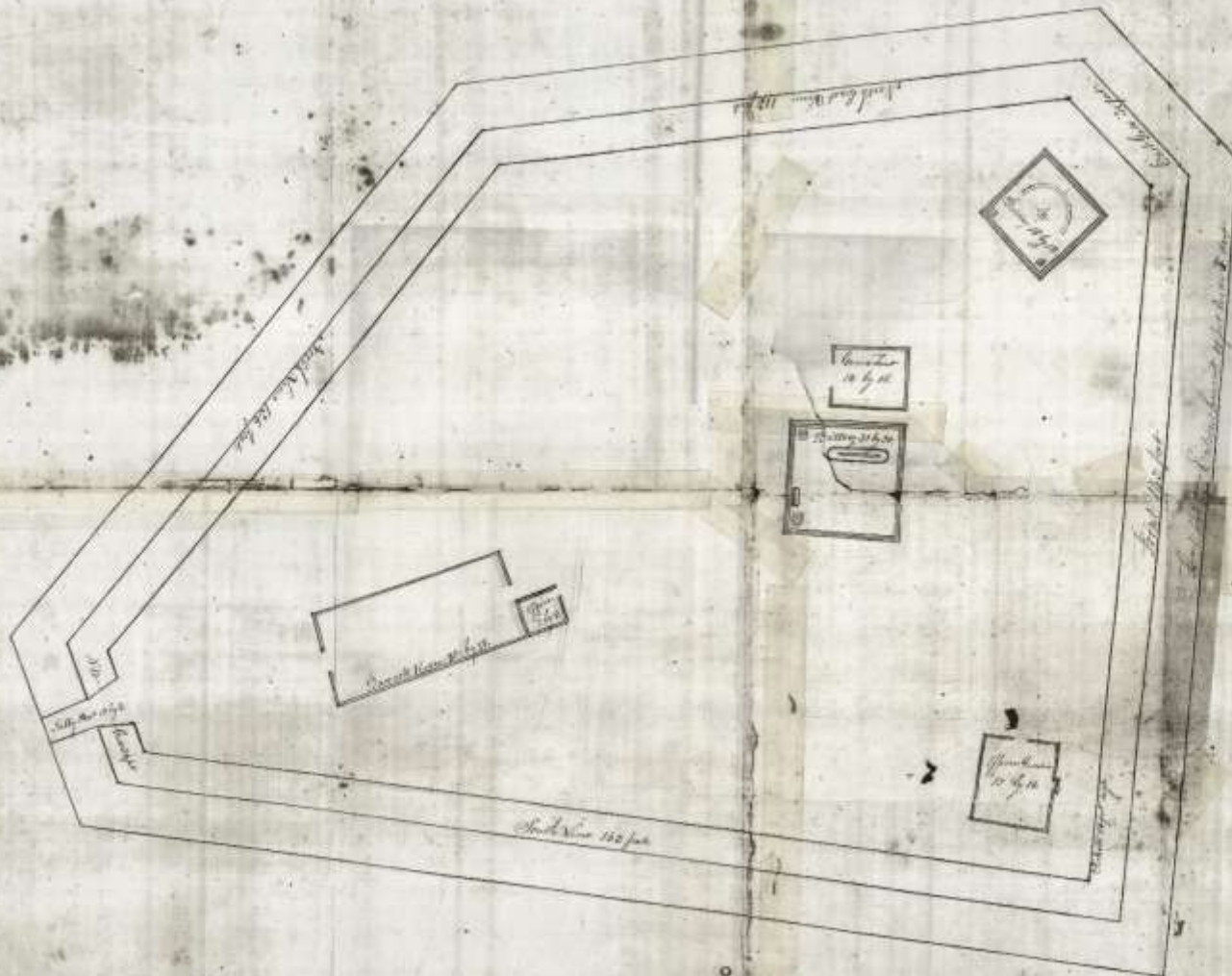


Republic of Texas Battery built in 1836



... from

**Nacogdoches
Archives**



*Soule's to the fort.
Fort Velasco.*

Brown-Hoskins hotel and tavern

First Capital of Texas at Old Velasco?



Santa Anna signed
Treaties of Velasco
here.

Seat of government
May-Oct 1836

Republic of Texas

1836

To Francis J Haskins - Dr

May 10th To Rent of house and Furniture at Velasco for the use of
 Genl Santa Anna, and other Prisoners from this date untill
 1st June being 22 days at \$5- Per day - \$110. 00
 To the Rent of Store for Soldiers quarters from May 10th
 untill 24th at \$2 Per day being 14 days - 28. 00

\$ 138 00

Deduct one days Rent 5. 00
 Certify this above to be correct
 to the best of my knowledge

Capⁿ H. [Signature]
 TX



Francis J. Haskins receipt
 from Republic of Texas
 for rent of house
 "Santa Anna and other Prisoners"
 10-May to 1-Jun-1836

Republic of Texas by H. Hoskins

1836

June 1st To Boarding Genl Santa Anna
 and Suite from 10th May to
 1st June 22 days at \$8.75 per day - \$191.50
 Deduct one days Board 8.75
 \$182.75

We do hereby certify that H. Hoskins
 of Velasco did furnish Board for
 Genl Santa Anna & Suite from 10th May
 to 1st June 1836

TX
 C. S. [Signature]
 Theodore S. [Signature]

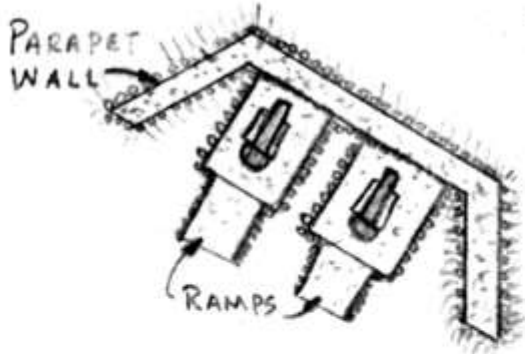


Isaac C. Hoskins receipt
 from Republic of Texas
 for boarding
 "Santa Anna and Suite"
 10-May to 1-Jun-1836

Santa Anna, Ramón Martínez Caro, Colonels Juan Nepomuceno Almonte and Gabriel Nuñez Ortega were held prisoner at Velasco during the signing of the Treaties of Velasco.

Civil War

“Town Redoubt” or “Town Fort”

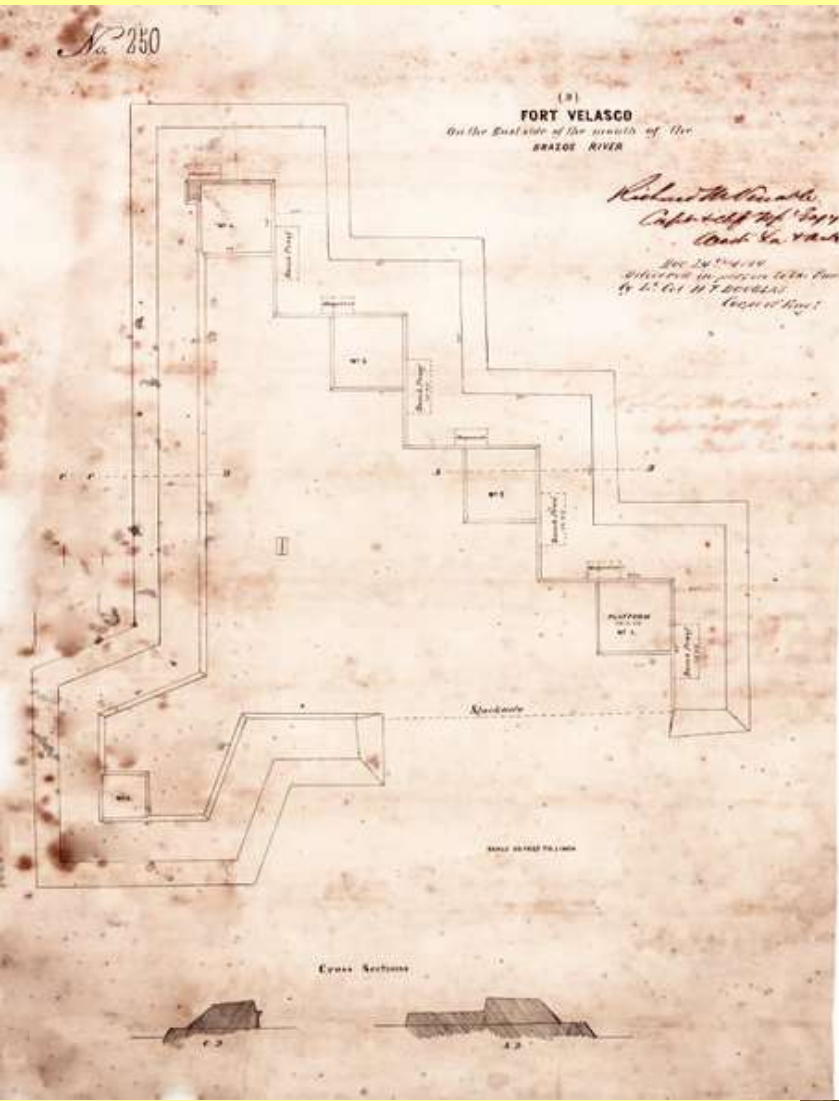


TOWN BATTERY REDOUBT

IN 1861-62, BEFORE FORTS VELASCO AND QUINTANA WERE CONSTRUCTED, THE CITIZENS OF VELASCO BUILT A REDOUBT OF SAND AND LOGS AT THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER FOR PROTECTION AGAINST POSSIBLE INVASION. THEY SECURED TWO BRASS CANNONS, 18 POUNDERS, AND MOUNTED THEM ON PARAPETS. LATER THEY TURNED THE REDOUBT OVER TO THE CONFEDERATE ARMY IN 1862. IT CONTINUED TO BE A PART OF FORT VELASCO.



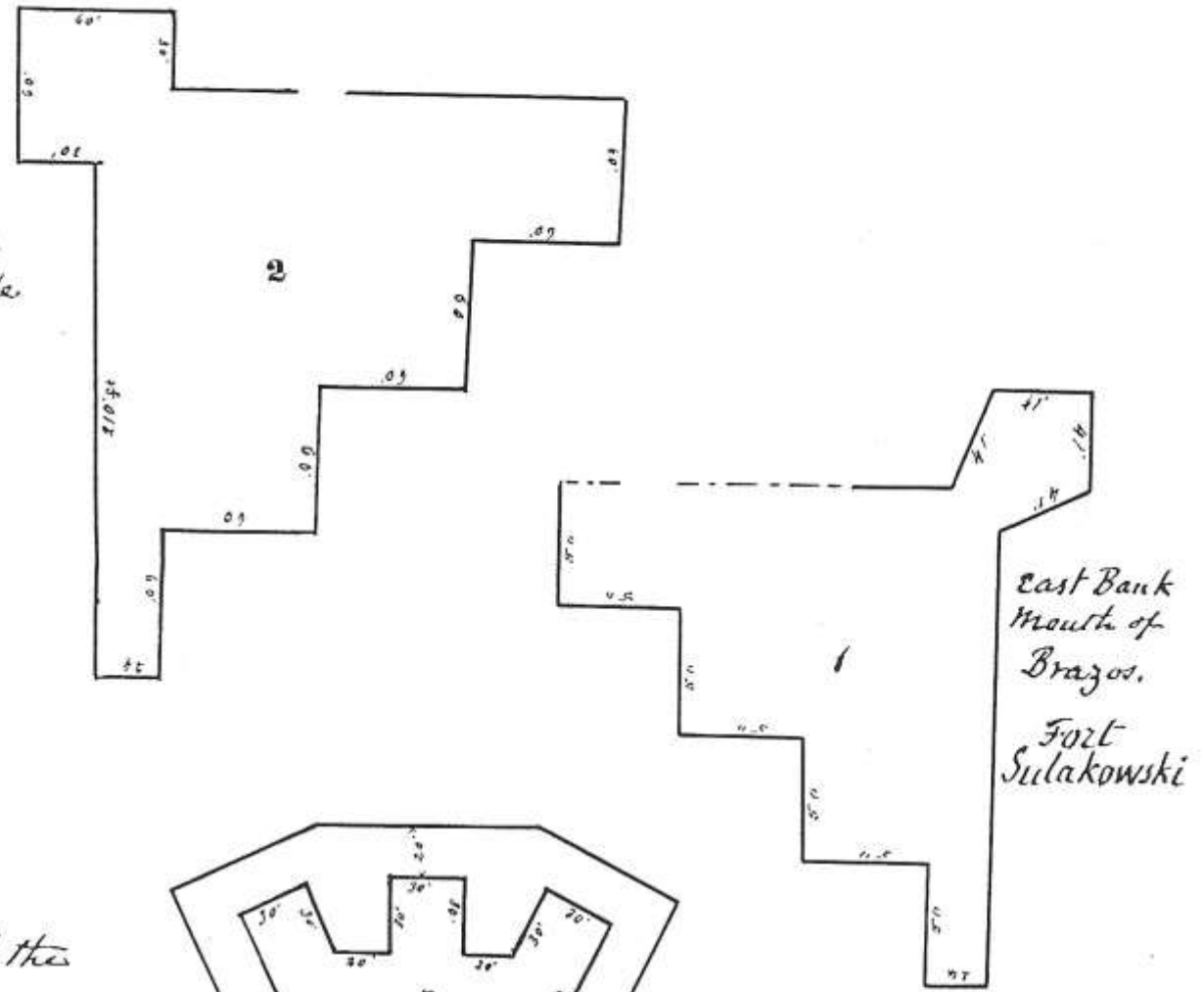
Civil War Fort Velasco (or Sulakowski)



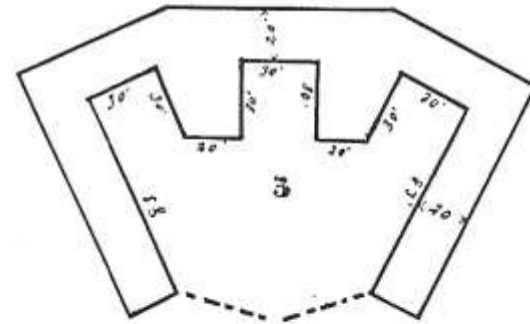
Cross's
drawings
of
completed
forts in
Winter
1863-1864



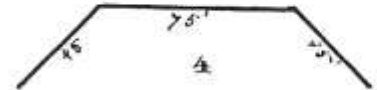
At 1st bend of the
Brazos on S.W. side
Fort Terrill.



At the Mouth of the
Brazos. W. Bank.
Fort Bates.



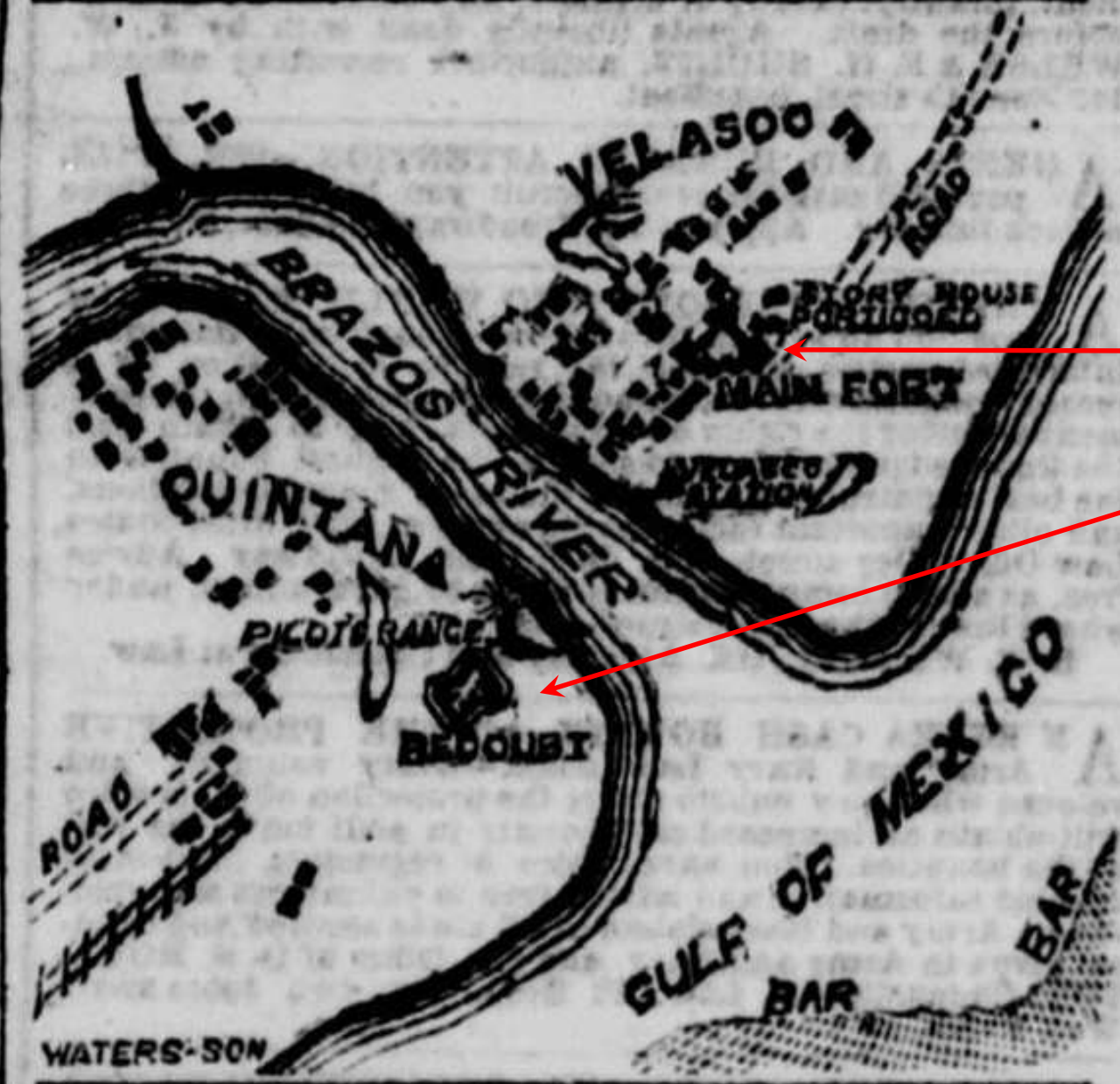
Redan on Oyster Creek 3 miles N.E. of Mouth of Brazos
to enfilade oyster Creek + Oyster Bay Canal.



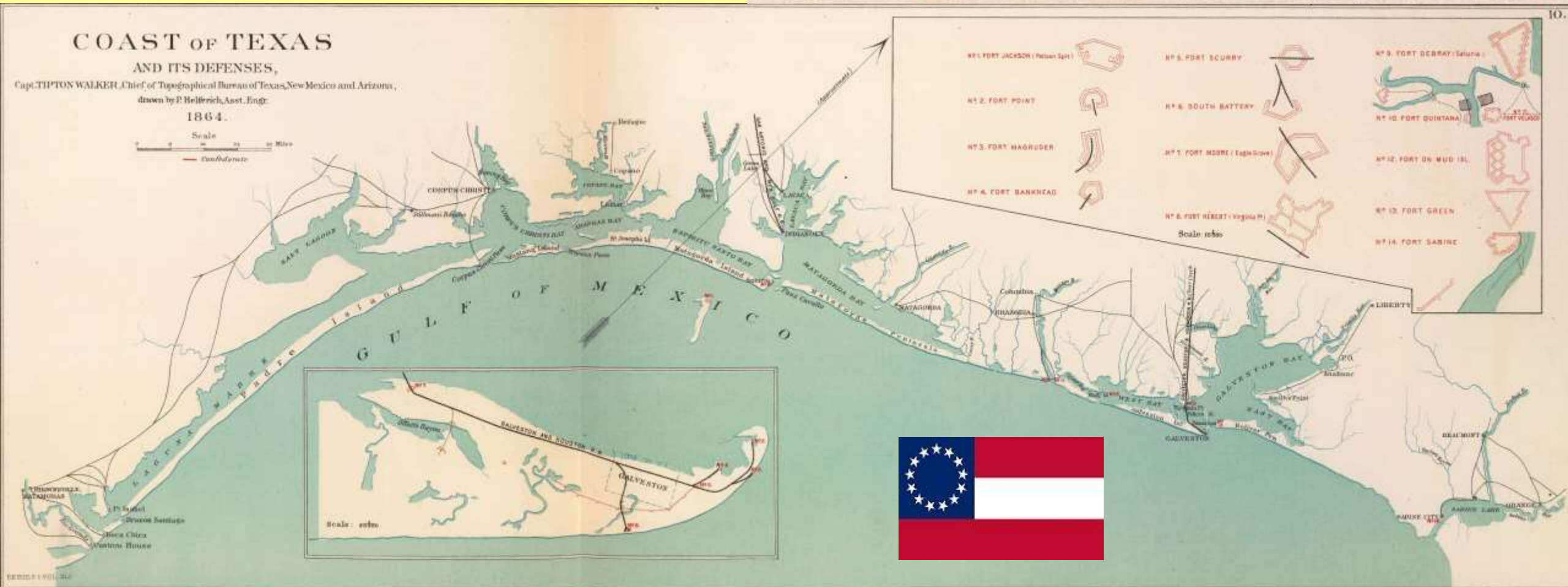
MAP OF THE MOUTH OF THE BRAZOS RIVER AND THE ENEMY'S DEFENCES LOCATED THERE, DRAWN BY CAPTAIN JAMES T. BAKER, CHIEF ENGINEER.

New York Herald 9-Jan-1864

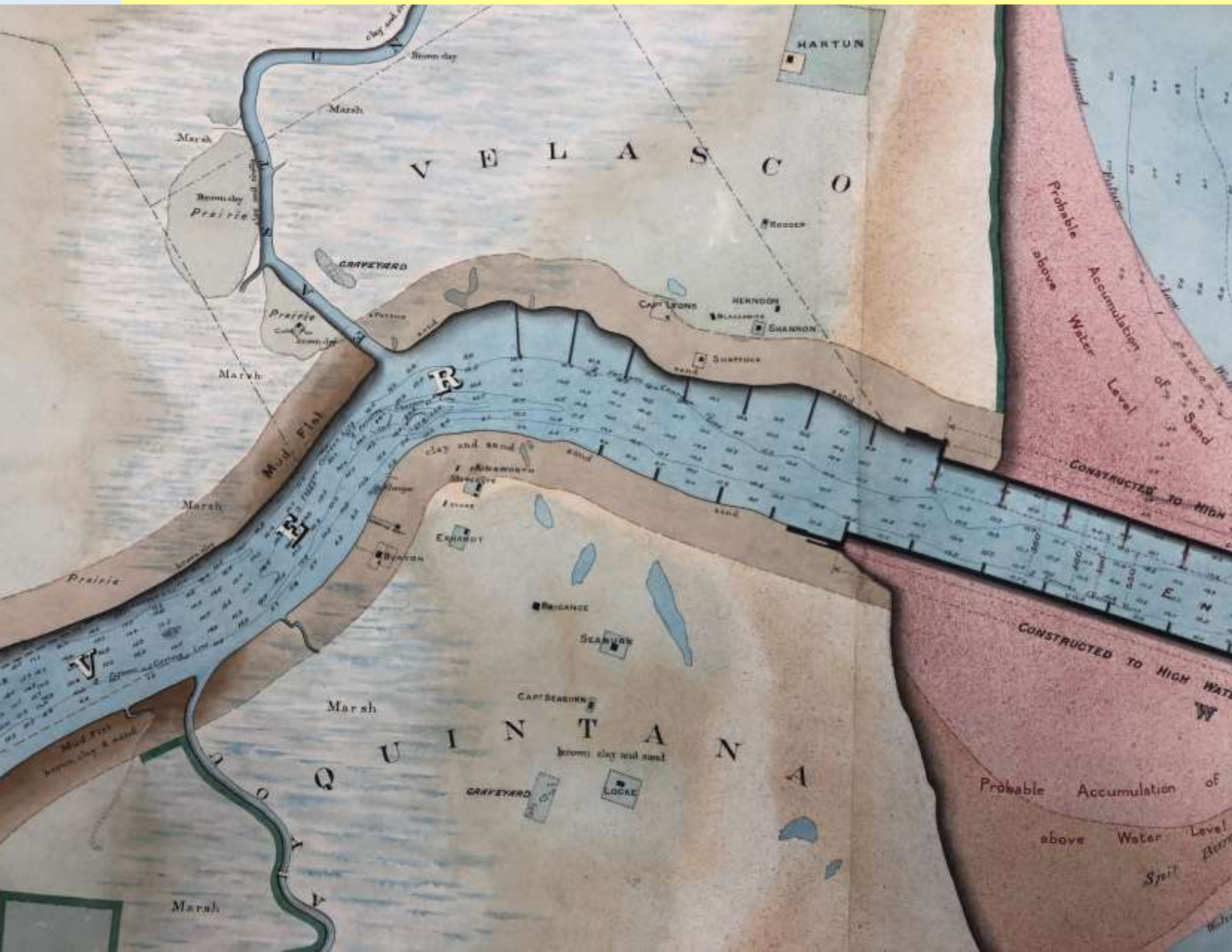
Civil War forts



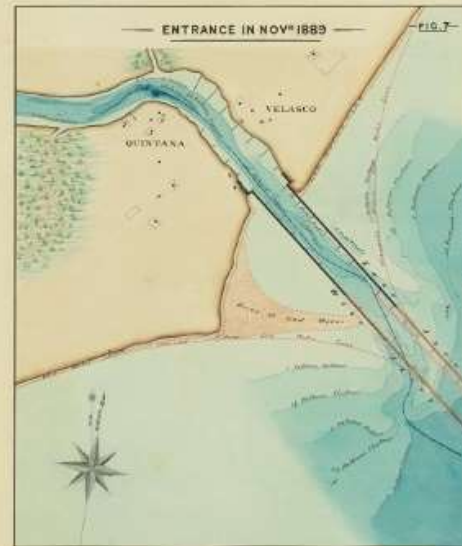
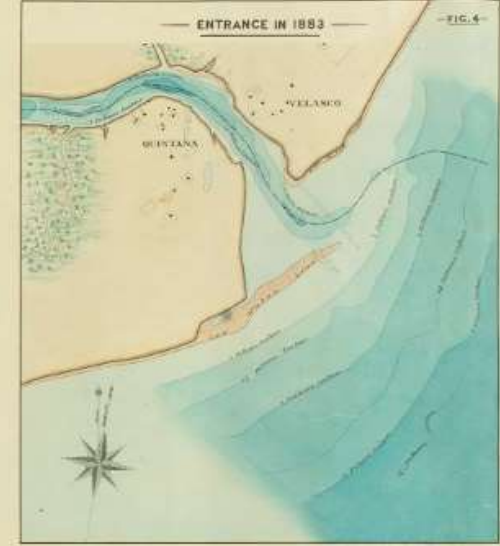
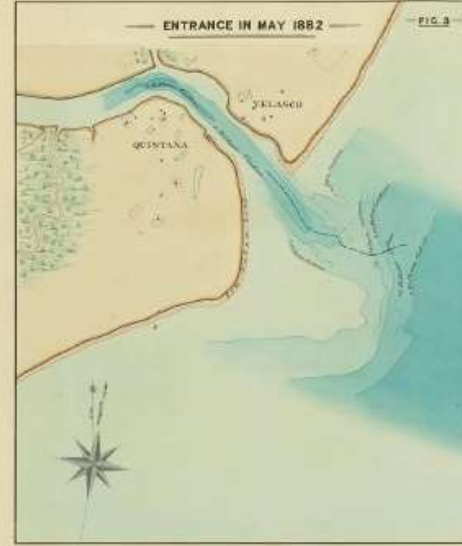
CSA Capt. Tipton Walker Map 1864



Sir John Coode Map 1890 - Drawing No. 2



Sir John Coode Map 1890 – Drawing No. 3



— DRAWING NO. 3 —

— BRAZOS RIVER —
— TEXAS —

COMPARATIVE PLANS OF ENTRANCE
AT DIFFERENT DATES

— TO ACCOMPANY SIR JOHN COODE'S REPORT —
— DATED 2ND APRIL 1890 —

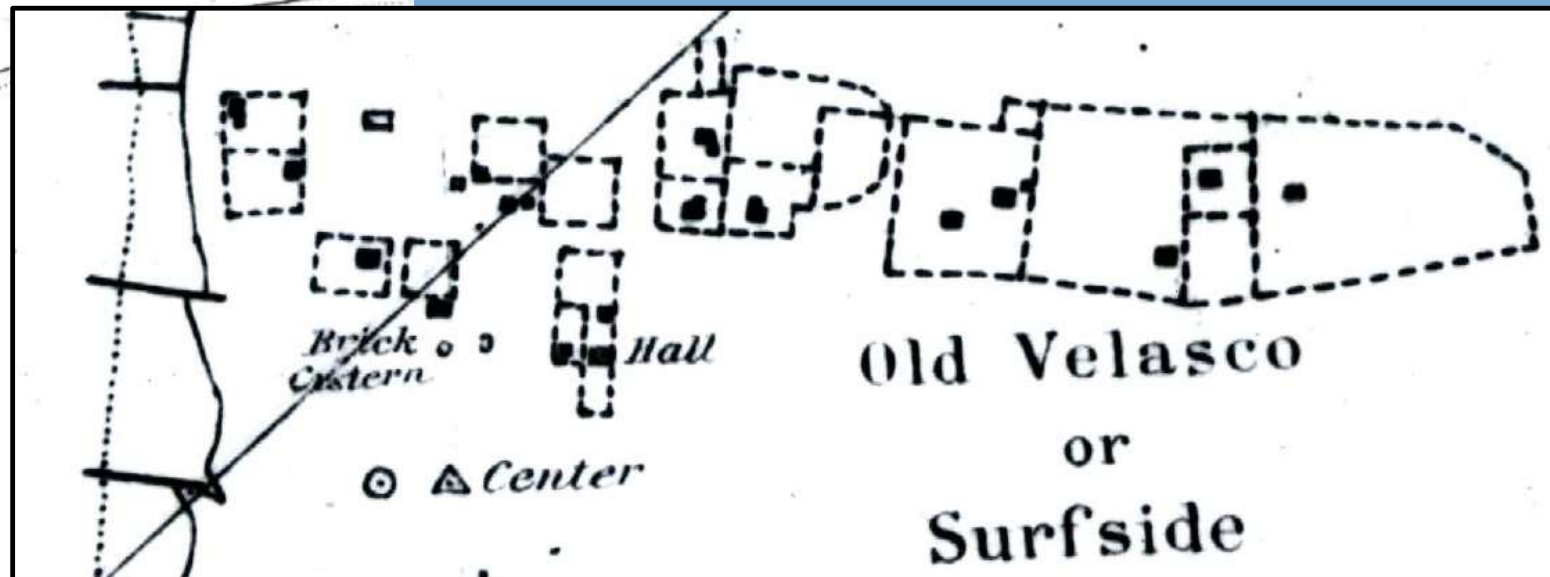
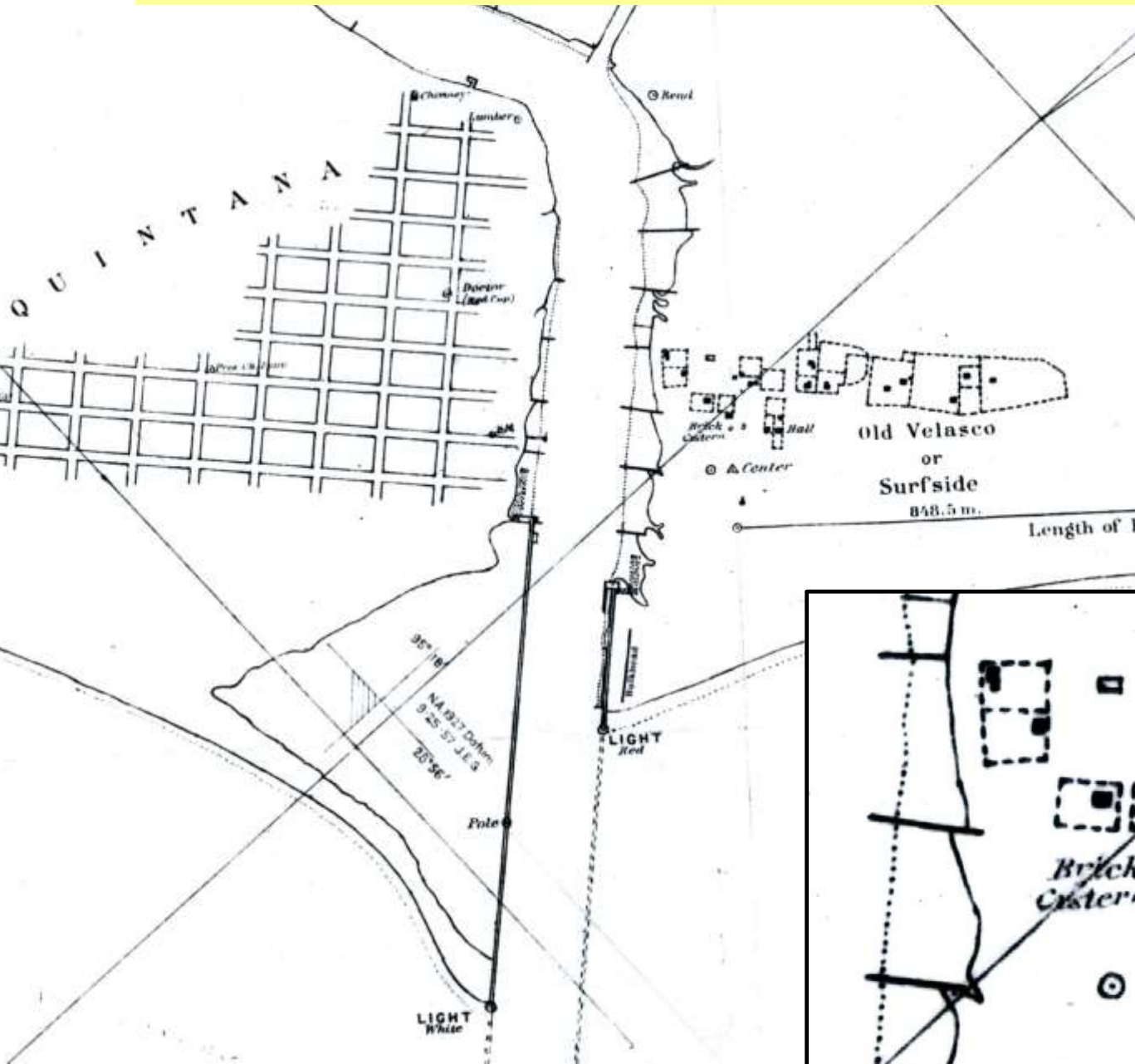
Lines of deposit water in each Diagram in above Plan
Sites of works mentioned under U.S. Survey Reports 1851, 1852
shown on Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

— NOTE —
CONTOURS SHOW DEPTH IN FATHOMS AND HALF FATHOMS
BELOW PLANE OF MEAN LOW WATER IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

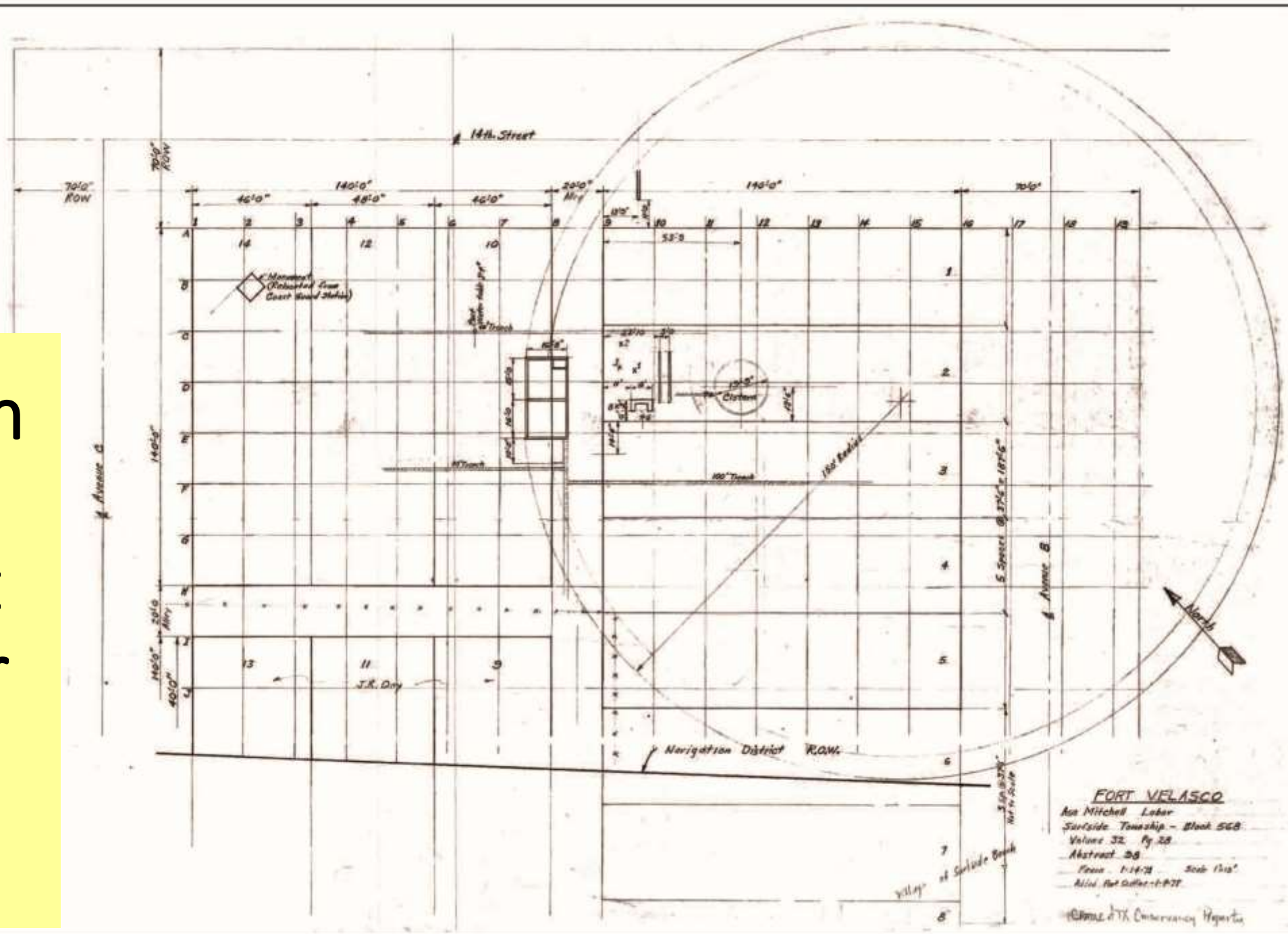
SCALE: 1 IN. = 1 NAUTICAL MILE. HORIZONTAL OR 1 IN. = 2000 FEET

Coode

USCGS Map 1891 – Velasco detail

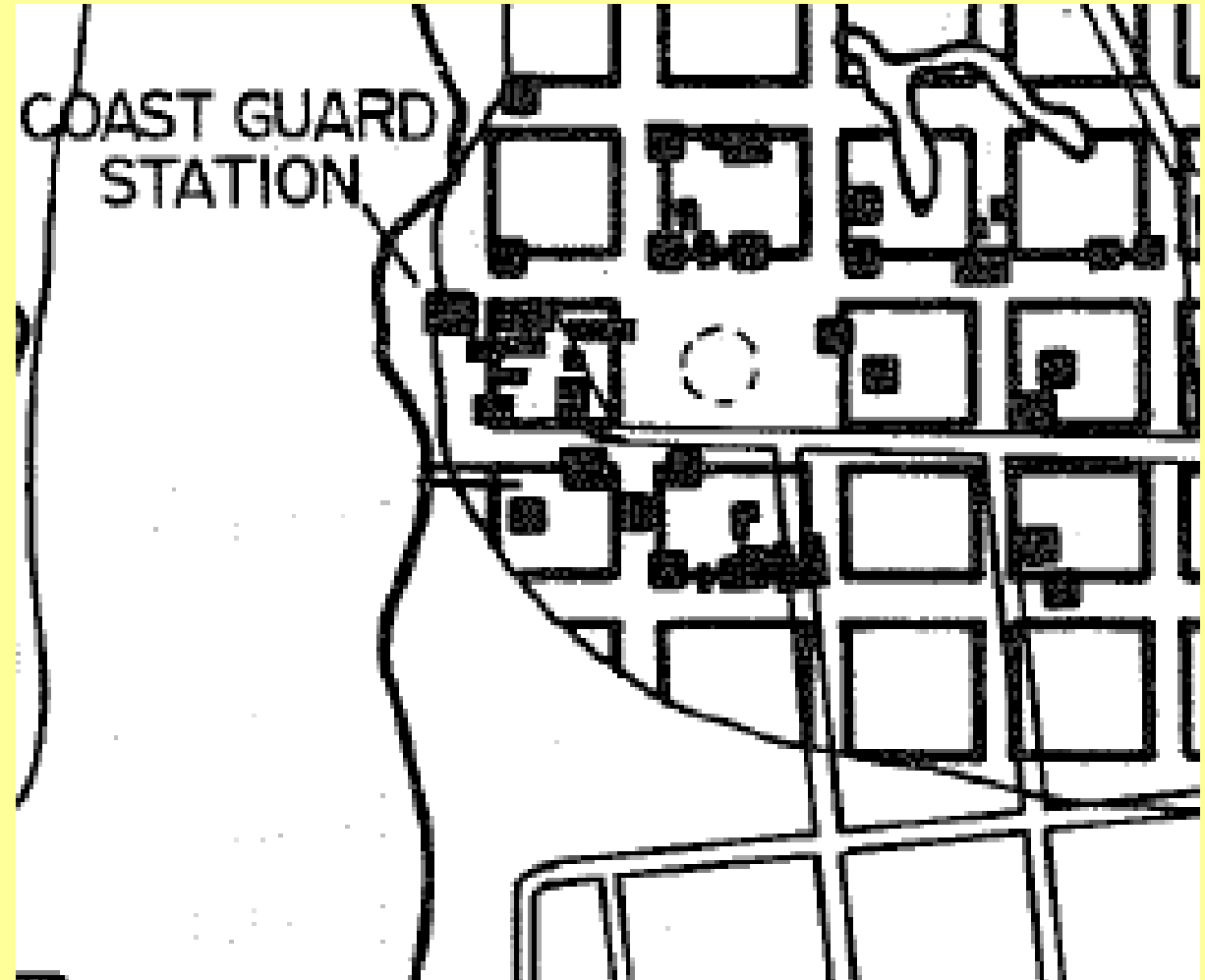
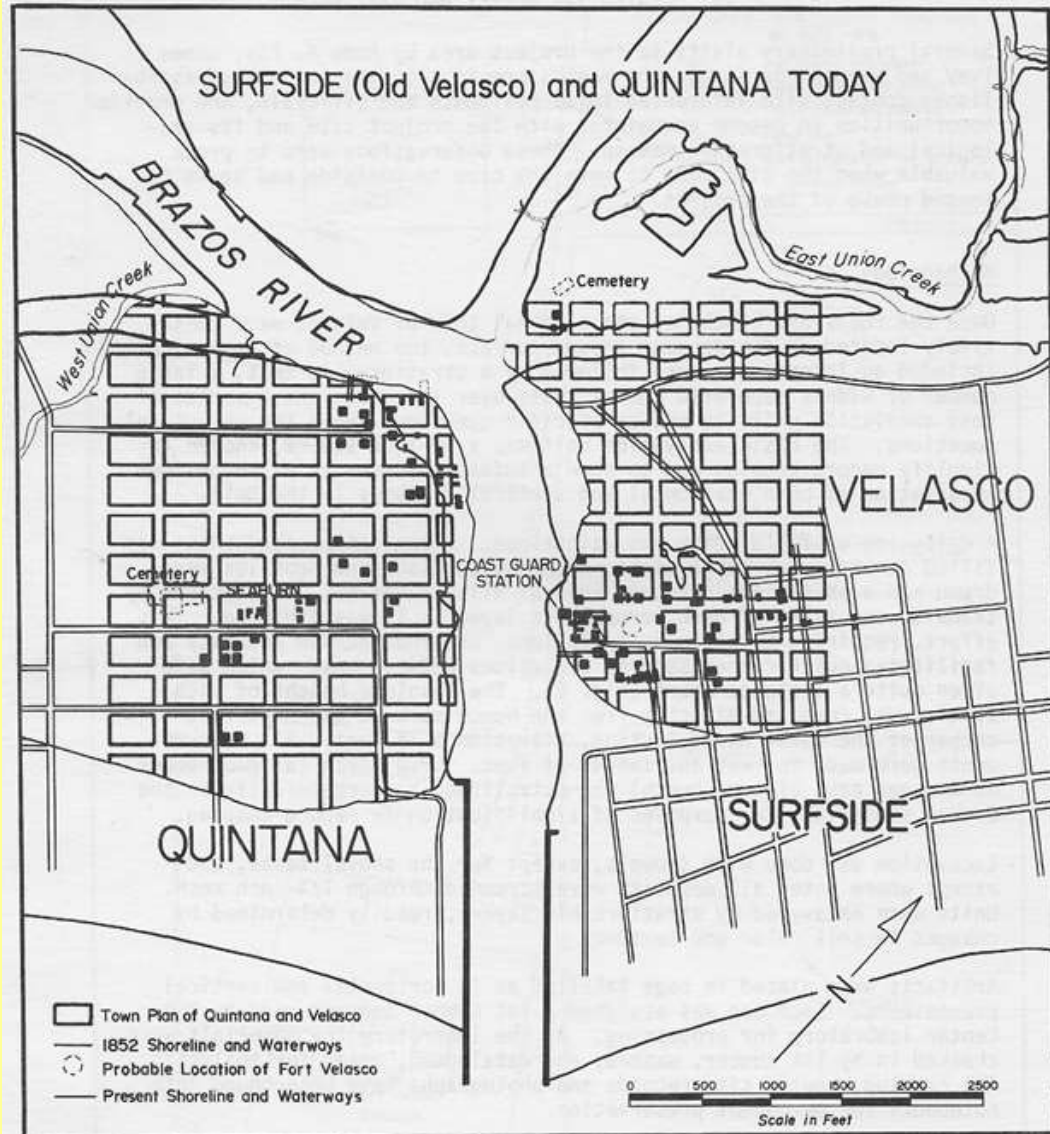


FVRA Plan
for
300-foot
diameter
Fort –
1970's



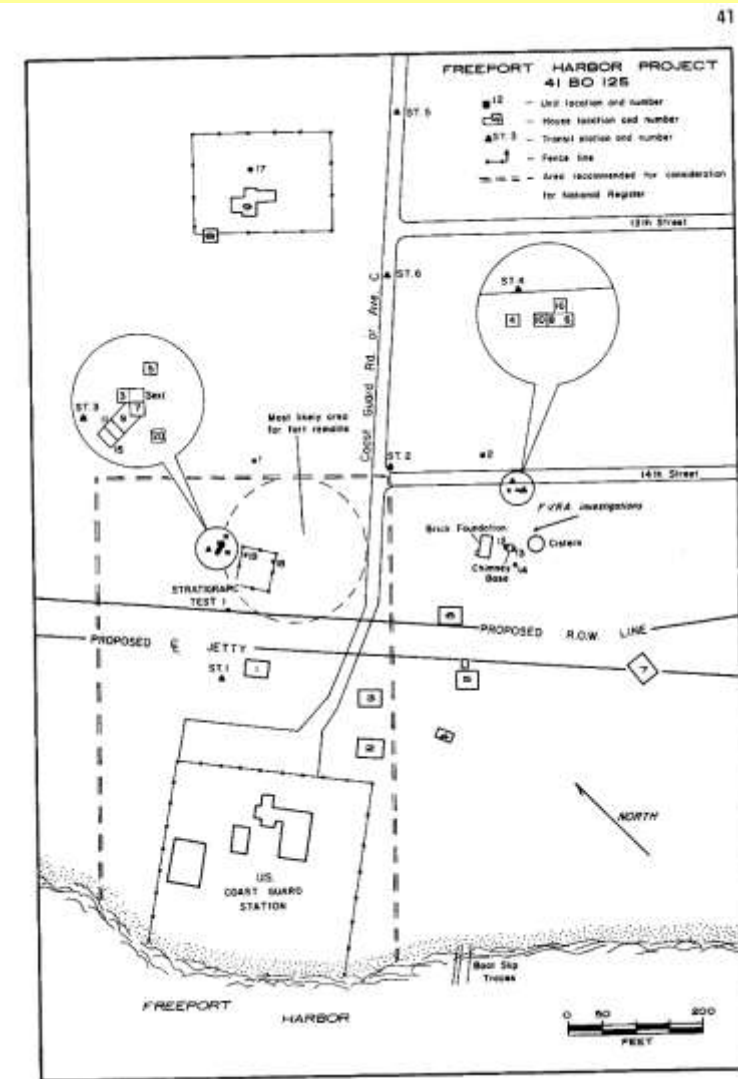
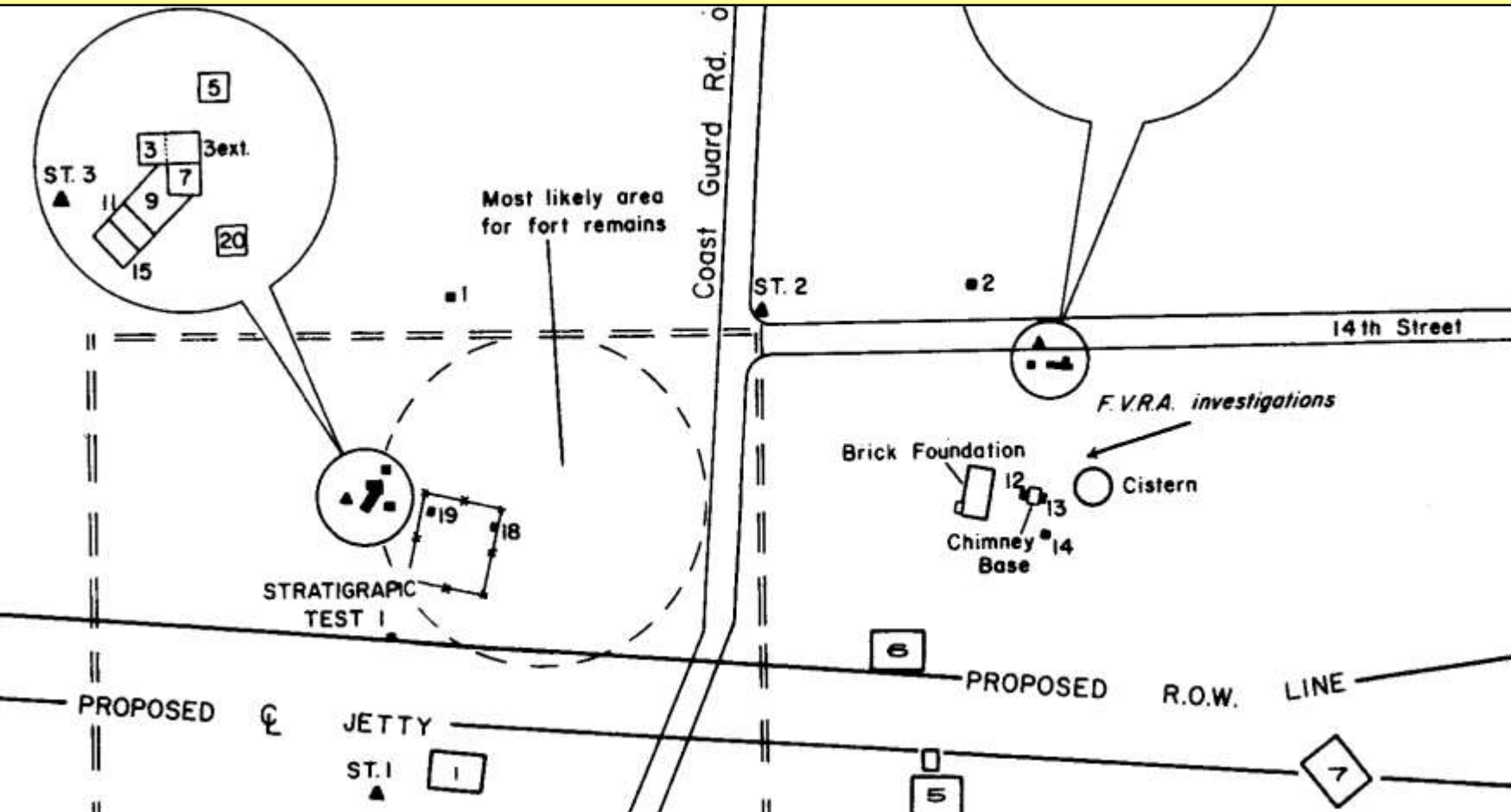
Cultural Resource Survey - 1980

Center for Archaeological Research at UTSA



Cultural Resource Survey - 1980

Center for Archaeological Research at UTSA



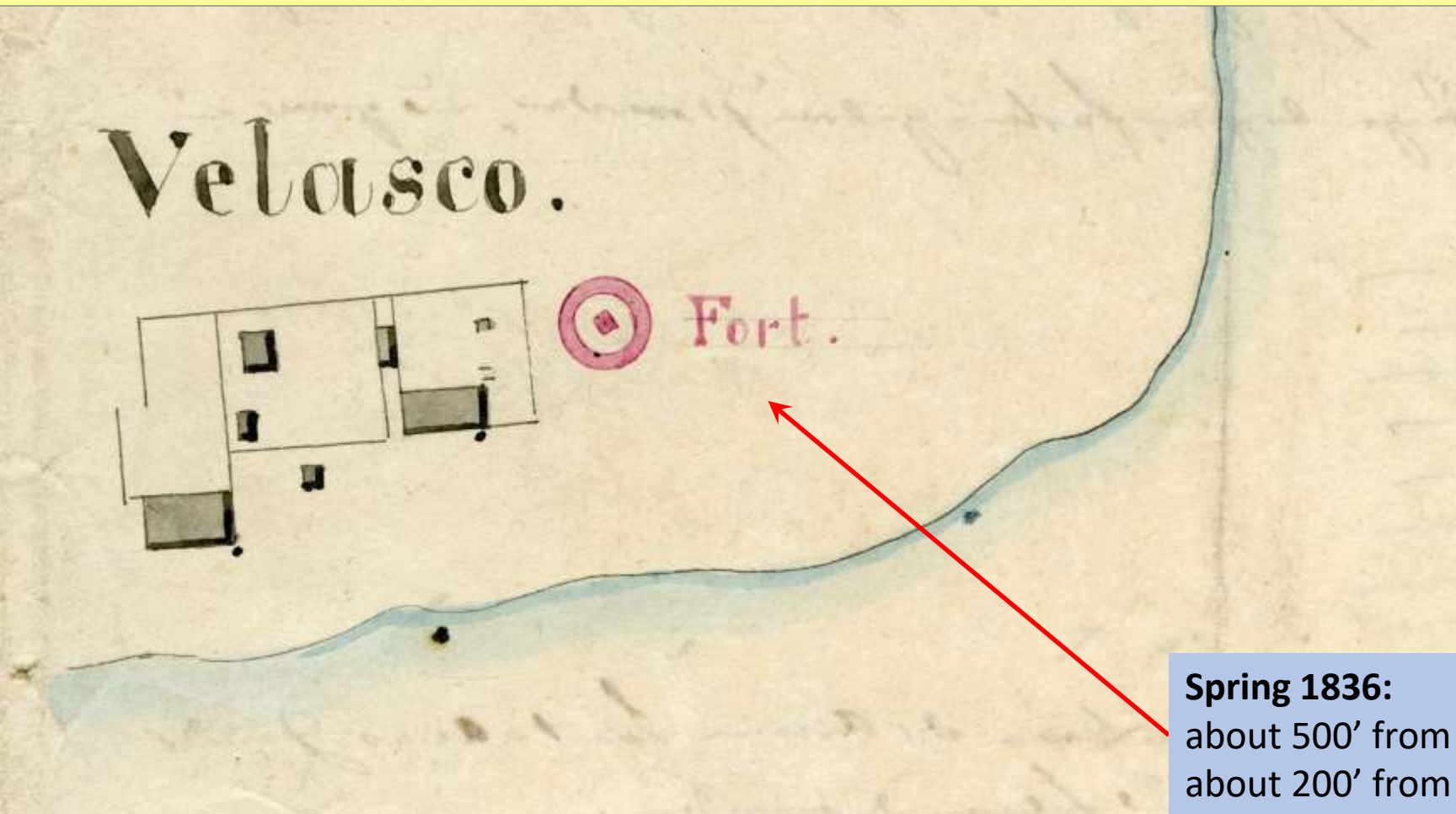
Excavation of Cutbank during Harbor Widening - 1992

Prewitt & Associates, Brazosport Archaeological Society

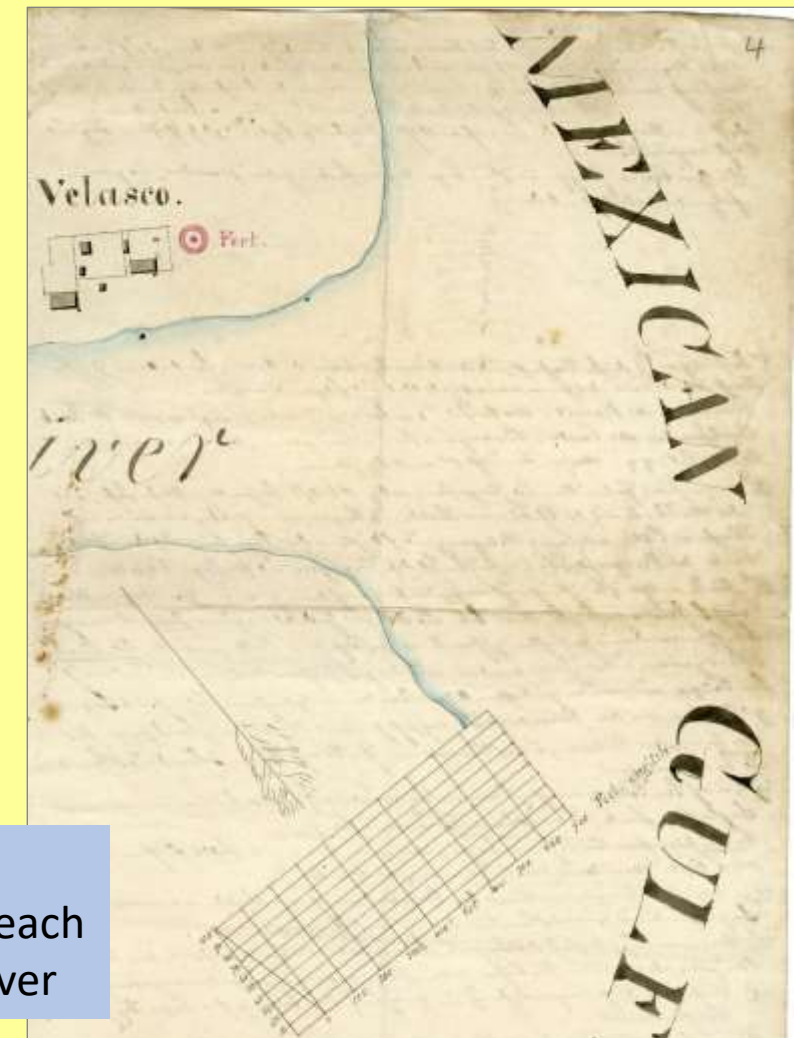


New Discovery - 1999

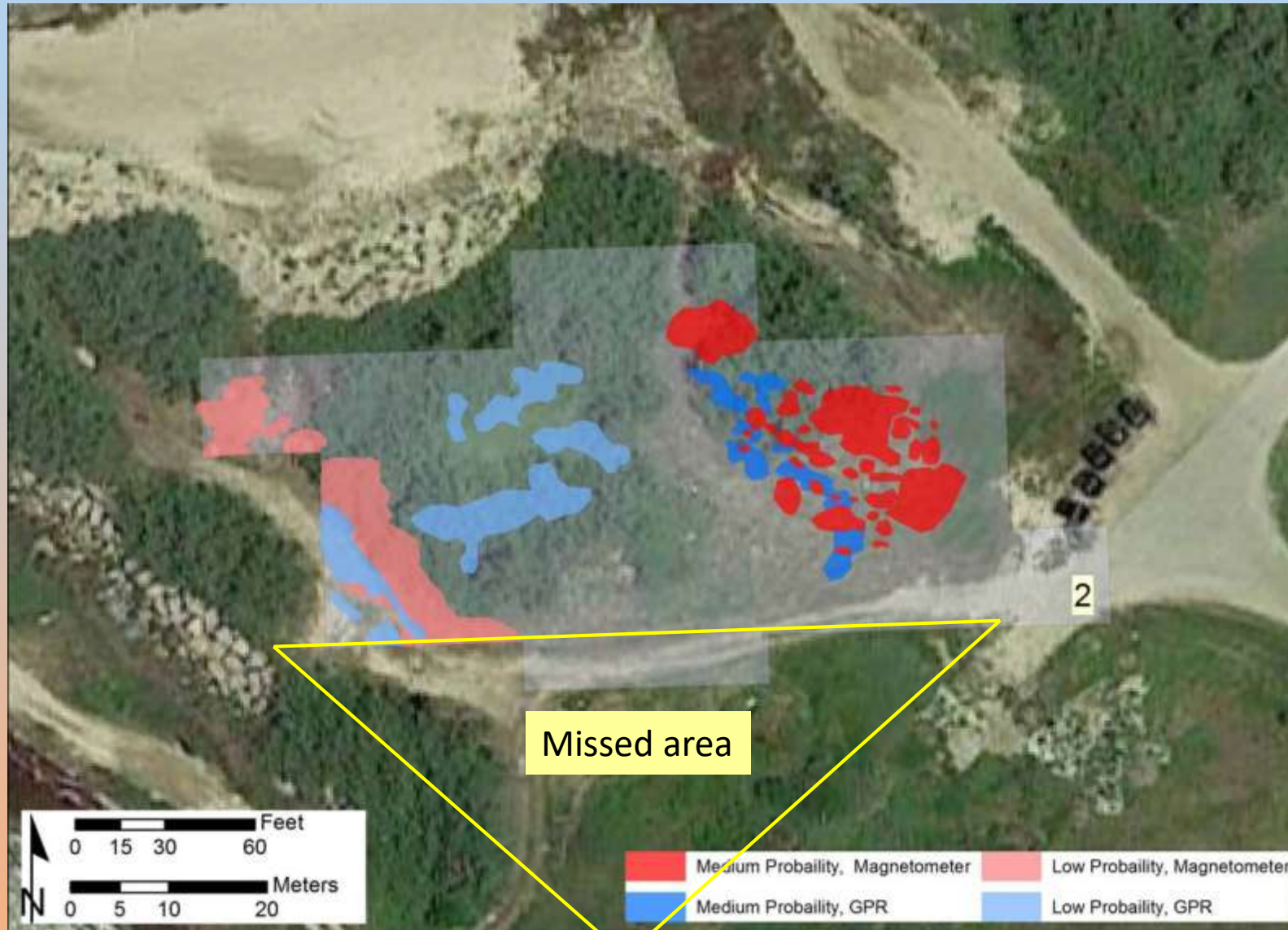
Eduard Harkort journal discovered in 1990's has scale drawing
- actual fort appears to be only about 100' diameter



Spring 1836:
about 500' from beach
about 200' from river



Geophysical Survey – GPR and Magnetometer Moore Archeological Consulting - 2015



Geophysical Survey Area 2020



Conclusions

- Premature and unsuccessful efforts were made by George Fisher to establish a customs post at the mouth of the Brazos in 1830.
- A customs post was established by soldiers under the command of Juan Davis Bradburn in 1831.
- The first Fort Velasco was built in 1832 by soldiers under the command of Domingo de Ugartechea. The Harkort drawing suggests it was about 100' in diameter.
- The second Fort Velasco was built during the Texas Revolution in early 1836. This fort and the Texas Navy protected Velasco, so the new government met here from May-Oct 1836, and Santa Anna signed the Treaties of Velasco during this time.
- The third and fourth Forts Velasco were built during the Civil War.
- Archaeology work continues in the form of a Remote Sensing project, to find the exact location of these forts and also graves from the Battle of Velasco.

Chronological and Archaeological History of the Forts Velasco

Fantabulous

new illustrated website:

<https://velascohistoryarchaeology.weebly.com>

Can also be reached via TMN-COT “Cultural History” web page.

Article has been submitted to the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*,
journal of the Texas State Historical Society

Looking for collaborator that can translate old Spanish documents!