



Texas Navy Association

Historical Article



The Texas Navy's 'Long Tom'

It wasn't like a potato; I knew it didn't grow underground," Michael Davis said, referring to the 4,700-pound cannon found on Broadway in Galveston last year.

A member of the 19th Century Living History Association, Davis spent nine months trying to identify the cannon. He began the search by tracing the history of the property where the cannon turned up. While looking for an owner who might have had access to such an item, Davis came across the name of John S. Brown, son of the man who built Ashton Villa in Galveston. In 1884, Brown owned the largest hardware store in Texas and was on the board of directors of the Galveston Wharf Company.

Further research showed that the Galveston Wharf Company, while deepening the harbor near Williams Wharf, unearthed two cannons and a portion of the frame of the *Brutus*, a warship from the Texas Navy. Davis discovered a receipt showing that Brown purchased the cannons and learned that on May 5, 1886, Brown moved the cannons from the wharf to his yard on Broadway.

The cannons remained on display as relics of the Navy of the Republic of Texas for 14 years. Then came the great hurricane of 1900 and the subsequent grade-raising which buried the cannons under three feet of soil. In 1974, the "Long Tom" from the *Brutus* surfaced again when Gulf Oil excavated the site at

By Karin Archer

2518 Broadway for a service station. It took another eight years for the cannon to be correctly identified as the only relic of the Texas Navy and not a relic of the Civil War, as previously assumed.

The 10-foot "Long Tom" and the *Brutus* played important roles in Texas' battle for independence. On March 30, 1836, the *Pocket*, a merchant ship owned by U.S. citizens and sailing under U.S. colors, was intercepted by the *Brutus* en route to Matamoros from New Orleans. Investigation revealed that the *Pocket* was sailing under false papers and her cargo was contraband of war. Also, four of her civilian passengers turned out to be officers of the Mexican Navy. The *Pocket* was carrying provisions to the Mexican Army as well as intelligence information for Santa Anna. The crew from the *Brutus* found dispatches describing the forces on each of the Texas warships and advising how to attack the Texans on land. A chart of the entire Texas coast showing the best place to land Mexican reinforcements was included with the dispatches.

Karin Archer of Houston, a free-lance writer and editor, has written two children's books and has another plus a novel under way.

Justice came swiftly to the offending parties. The Mexican officers were stretched on the 18-pounder, the "Long Tom," given 100 lashes with a cat-o'-nine tails, and then cast into irons for several months.

Historians now agree that one of the most important elements in the Texas Revolution was the brief but furious maritime activity of the first Texas navy. The four small sailing vessels, headquartered at Galveston, prevented the Mexican government from landing a second army on the Texas coast, an army that would have trapped General Sam Houston and his small command between immensely superior forces. The *Texas Independence*, *Brutus*, *Invincible*, and *Liberty* forced the larger Mexican Navy to disperse its strength and prevented them from supplying Santa Anna. Captured munitions from Mexican ships were delivered to Houston's army. They helped ensure the victory at San Jacinto.

Davis says the "Long Tom" is doubly rare. Besides being the last remaining relic of the Texas Navy, it also is the only cannon of its type known to exist in the United States.

It has been more than 145 years since the *Brutus* sank in Galveston harbor. The "Long Tom," the largest cannon in the Texas Navy, was donated by Gulf Oil to the Galveston Historical Foundation. It is now on exhibit at the Hendley Building, 2916 The Strand, Galveston. □