The SHAMROCK

Fall 1963

John Armstrong

...TEXAS RANGER By J. Evetts Haley

Nothing is more powerful in the life of the Texas Ranger than tradition. It bolsters the moral force that sustains him when the going gets rough. It imbues him with a sense of pride in being a part of history—of a storied past that started long before him and, if he is but true to its demands, will survive and give heart to others long after he is dead and gone.

The personal conviction that this tradition was born in bravery, that it grew strong with the challenge of danger, and that it was nourished with the blood and lives of bold men, places a peculiar compulsion upon every Ranger. It is in fact the powerful psychological and moral force that sets him apart and differentiates him from other officers. Today the problems, methods, equipment and nature of the men who enforce law throughout America are much the same. Yet a Texas Ranger is still a man apart. The reason lies in tradition.

The life of John Barclay Armstrong goes far to explain why this is so. Like many other famous Texas fighting men, he was born in Tennessee, at Readyville, January 1, 1850, and grew up under the strong influence of his father, Dr. John Barclay Armstrong, a country doctor and planter of lively spirit and commanding presence, and his mother, Maria Ready, a Southern lady of cultivated background, literary accomplishment, and firm religious principles. He came to Texas in 1870 and stopped at Austin.

Texas was then a likely stage of action for a man of young Armstrong's aptitudes and nature. Reconstruction from Civil War and military defeat was being laboriously pursued beneath the conquerors' bayonets. Corruption and vindictive policy in high places found reflection in disorder and violence below. Some sections of the state were torn by feuds that approached civil wars, outlaws were establishing their own jurisdictions and principalities, and the Mexican borderlands were swept by brigandage and guerilla warfare.

Yet in their domination of any land, even the corrupt at times are finally forced to seek the restitution of tranquility and order, and in their concern sometimes turn to men of purpose and integrity. Thus it was that the Carpetbag regime of Texas reorganized the Rangers and called on real men to lead them. Among these was a youthful Confederate veteran, a consumptive, diminutive, soft-voiced Methodist minister by the name of Leander H. McNelly. In the ranks of the resolute who have brought so much distinction to this fighting force, he still looms without a peer.

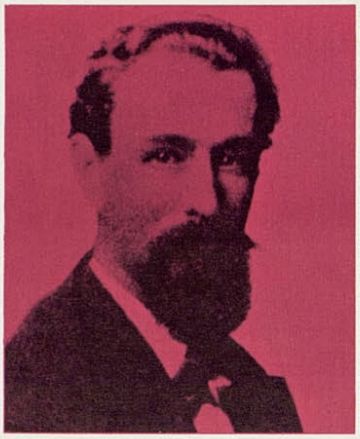
When McNelly took an oath to uphold the laws of the State of Texas, he believed implicitly in his mission. He knew the nature of the lawless, he knew their domination of the land he was to range, he knew their ruthlessness and their lust for power. He knew the only thing they respected was force; the only thing they feared was death. He realized that among these hardened men the sovereignty of the law in Texas was a myth. But with him it was an ideal. And when backed by the iron resolve of McNelly and his men, that was enough.

In 1874 he organized his company and marched into DeWitt County in southwest Texas to throw a damper on the wide-spread, deadly Taylor-Sutton feud. Among the men who rode close behind the sickly, "five-foot-six" McNelly was Sergeant John B. Armstrong, whose commanding figure was the public image of the traditional Texas Ranger.

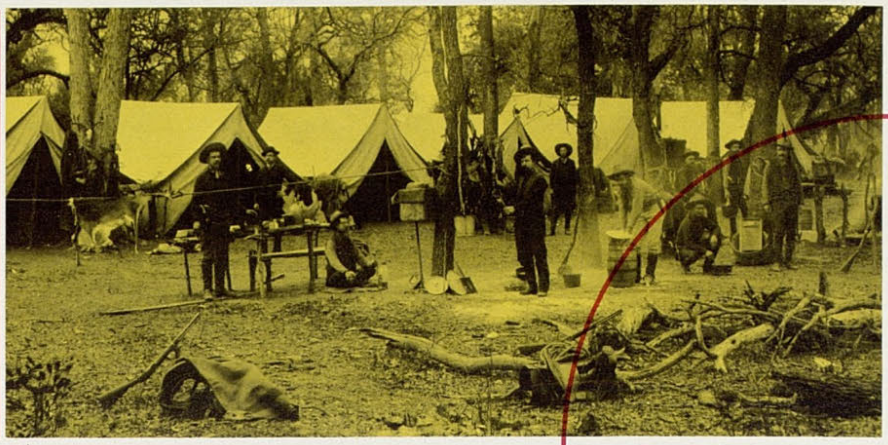
Armstrong was obviously a man of superior bearing and breeding. He was possessed of pride of family, a sense of humor, a love of music, a firm religious faith, a cool head, and a lust for action and adventure that made him an object of profound respect at the proper and business end of a gun. Of all the men who followed their little ministerial leader in ushering the lawless into permanent if premature peace, this towering gentleman from Tennessee was to become McNelly's favorite warrior.

Despite the need of law in the Cuero and Victoria country, that to the south was even greater, and shortly McNelly was ordered to the Mexican border. In open contempt of the United States Army, and often in cahoots with the local constabulary, large and efficient bands of Mexicans, abetted by renegade *gringos*, swept the country for horses and herds of cattle, killing and pillaging as they came and went, clear beyond the Nueces and the considerable town of Corpus Christi.

McNelly and his men rode into Corpus Christi, and the residents, holed-up in anticipation of another raid, flocked out of hiding to greet them. The Captain's reputation had ridden ahead, and when the women laid



Texas Ranger Captain Lee McNelly



This excellent photograph of Camp Leona shows a typical Ranger camp about 1886.

admiring eyes upon John Armstrong, they just knew that stalwart and impressive man must be Captain McNelly, and they showered him with hugs and kisses. Ranger George Durham, a rugged farm boy and fresh recruit from Georgia, recalled that the gallant and amused Armstrong "cooperated," but when they addressed him as "Captain McNelly," he modestly demurred.

"Why *I'm not* Captain McNelly!" he said, and pointing, added: "There's Captain McNelly." "What," the admiring circle ejaculated; "that little bit of a man? *Is that* Captain McNelly?"[1]

The parsimonious State had not even outfitted him, and McNelly drew on Sol Lichtenstein's ample store for supplies, shells and single-shot Sharps rifles. Sol suggested instead the lighter repeating rifles, saying that the Rangers would have so much better chance if they missed. "I don't want men who miss," retorted McNelly, as he took the heavy Sharps.

There McNelly learned of a recent raid on Nuecestown, to the west, where the raiders had stolen eighteen new Dick Heye, San Antonio-made saddles, which, with their sweeping tapaderos and shining silver conchas, were the fanciest and best of the saddle-maker's art. He got a detailed description of those saddles, left orders that no more should be sold in that section, and, turning to Sergeant Armstrong, said:

"Describe those saddles to the Rangers. Make sure they understand exactly. Then order them to empty those saddles on sight. No palavering with the riders. Empty them. Leave the men where you drop them and bring the saddles to camp."

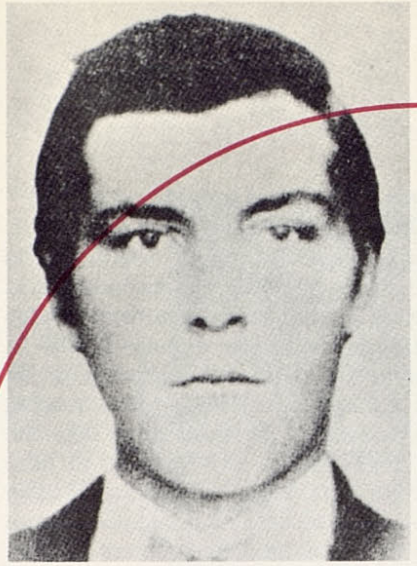
Through the months ahead, that order was scrupulously carried out, and while political Austin stormed and fretted and seemed unable to understand, the hard men who popped the brush in their outlawry and knew the devious trails of the *brasada*, understood!

At the Santa Gertrudis the Rangers were mounted on good horses by Captain Richard King. McNelly then swept south "like a chicken hawk," nobody knowing "where he would dab down next," and overtook a formidable band of outlaws in the Palo Alto region as they headed for Mexico with a herd of stolen cattle. The outlaws took strategic refuge upon an island where McNelly could attack only by charging in knee-deep water across a *resaca*, or marsh, and there they confidently waited, almost in the shadow of the Federal forces at Fort Brown.

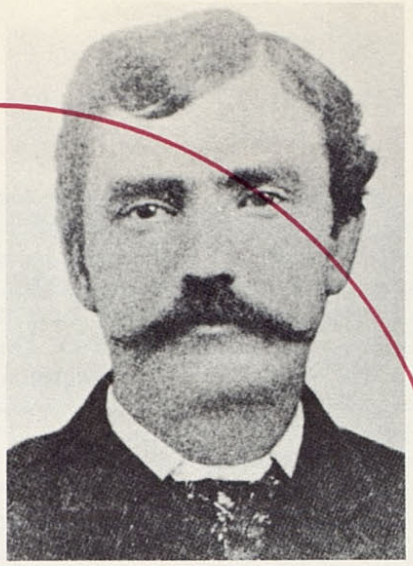
On this historic battlefield, Armstrong, Durham and the other young recruits got their baptism of fire. If McNelly's methods now seem severe, it should be recalled that in the years before possibly two thousand Texans had been killed and hundreds of thousands of cattle stolen by these border raiders. It should be remembered that captured outlaws were turned loose as fast as they were carried in, that the law was completely impotent, and that the United States troops were held in contempt.

George Durham recalled that "the military had to fight by the books as written in Washington. But those Nueces outlaws didn't fight by any books. Neither did Captain McNelly. They made their own rules, and Captain made his. They didn't mind killing. Neither did Captain McNelly. They didn't

[1]While a number of good books touch on McNelly's exploits, and notably W. P. Webb's *The Texas Rangers*, by far the most vivid portrayal of McNelly and his men is to be found in Clyde Wantland's *Taming the Nueces Strip*, U. of T. Press, 1962, being the ably edited recollections of George Durham.



John Wesley Hardin



King Fisher

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take prisoners. Neither did Captain McNelly."

"These outlaws," McNelly told his men, "claim to be bigger than the law. . . . It's up to us to see if they're right or if they're wrong. We've got fighting to do. But I'll never send you into a fight. I'll lead you in."

On June 11, 1875, McNelly led his men in at Palo Alto, their horses splashing in water to their knees. He led them straight into the fire of the outlaws sheltered in the brush on the island, holding his own fire until within six-shooter range. One of his men was killed, but all the outlaws died.

McNelly praised them by saying that he had "never seen men fight with such desperation." From the battlefield he marched into Brownsville to report, to bury his dead Ranger, and to send a wagon after the bodies. All proved to be followers of the noted General Juan Cortinas, the Mexican border chieftain who had given the Texans so much trouble. When the news spread there was wild excitement. It was feared that Cortinas, who commanded twelve to fourteen hundred men, might cross the Rio Grande and wipe out Brownsville. But McNelly was not bothered. He ordered the bodies of the bandits stacked like cordwood on the public square – by one report there were twelve, by another sixteen – where they were left as an object lesson until relatives and friends came to claim them.

The effect on the morale of the outlaws was devastating; on that of the Border, miraculous. From Brownsville McNelly took Armstrong and his force up the river, scouting the brush for wayfaring bands. He established his own spy and espionage systems, ordering his men to bring all suspicious characters into camp. His methods always induced even the most hardened outlaws to talk, and when they were pumped dry of information, he turned them over to his personal executioner, Jesus Sandoval, who had so suffered at their hands as to but live with a consuming passion to kill them off. There is a story that McNelly himself dispatched the first prisoners taken, before Jesus joined him. In the rough and ruthless exactions of that hard and brushy land, there was no place and time for prisoners.

Whenever McNelly met a posse of Texans seeking to redress their own grievances, he read the riot act to them and ordered them to disarm at once. If they were reluctant, he was ruthless, even pulling his watch, on occasion, telling them they could comply or be treated as outlaws within ten minutes – and they knew the fate of outlaws at McNelly's hands. Too often these groups had vented their feelings upon innocent Mexicans.

He disciplined his Rangers with an iron hand, ordering them to treat the Texas-Mexicans with upmost respect. They were never to take anything from the Mexicans, not even a chicken or an egg; they were not to shoot their dogs, even if their dogs annoyed or attacked them; and they were never to enter their homes, even when invited, unless their men were present. No discipline or code like this had ever been brought to bear upon that harsh border, and as a consequence the native Mexicans not only respected but came to love him.

His most famous exploit was his invasion of Mexico with a handful of men to attack the outlaws in force at Los Cuevas Ranch, near Rio Grande City. When the Army stood by, immobilized by the timidity and protocol of Washington, he went anyway, backed closely by Ranger Armstrong who

drew the first blood in the battle that followed. The audacity of his "armed invasion," his lack of personal concern with his deadly and precarious position, his sense of daring diplomacy in the negotiations that followed, his dogged insistence upon the Mexicans meeting his demands even when he seemed to be in a hopeless position, and his absolute disdain for the brass and the politicians in Austin and Washington, set McNelly apart as a leader. No wonder his men proudly called themselves "little McNellys," and worshipped the ground he walked upon.

With the fear of McNelly, if not of a wrathful God, upon them, there was an understandable hiatus in the outlaws' depredations along the lower Rio Bravo. McNelly then moved toward Carrizo Springs and Espantosa Lake, to take that extraordinary outlaw, King Fisher and his leaders, who, with their far-ranging bands, dominated a principality as big as many an eastern state. As usual, McNelly led the charge, riding straight for King Fisher himself, sure that the outlaw would not surrender and that he would get to kill him. To McNelly's obvious disgust and also confusion, King Fisher gave up, and when turned over to the officials at Eagle Pass was immediately released.

This collusion of local officials with the outlaws was characteristic of the Texas border counties, and after this open affront, McNelly, who was rapidly dying of tuberculosis, was disheartened. He relied more and more upon his steady and eager sergeant, John Armstrong, who had always ridden close behind him. He made his weary way back to the old Menger Hotel in San Antonio where he lingered in his illness, with the State refusing to pay his hotel expenses. In order to meet the bill as he lay dying, he had to sell the marvelous horse that Captain King had given him – old Segal, the horse that had carried him so dangerously and so far in the service of Texas.

In November, 1876, Sergeant Armstrong led McNelly's rangers back into the Carrizo Springs country in a raid on King Fisher's stronghold, killing four Americans and one Mexican in three separate fights on one night, besides recovering a stolen herd of horses and cattle.

Lee Hall, a personable man with political pull, was sent to take McNelly's place, and for awhile the doughty company was held together by Armstrong and other great fighters in the McNelly tradition. It was reorganized at Victoria, January 26, 1877, with Armstrong as Second Lieutenant. In April the Rangers were again at court in Eagle Pass where King Fisher was indicted. Armstrong had truly become the little Captain's successor – "a man after McNelly's own heart."

Again he was active with Ranger details in the Taylor-Sutton feud in which the notorious Texas killer, John Wesley Hardin, and his kinsmen were involved. Hardin had killed a deputy sheriff in Comanche, causing the state to put a price on his head, and while Armstrong was inactive, recovering from an accidental wound, he decided to take the trail of Hardin. Through the investigations of John Duncan, a detective, Armstrong learned that Hardin was living in southern Alabama, and he and Duncan left to take him. They learned that he had gone to Pensacola, but was to return by train. Armstrong planned to take him at a wayside stop, notified the local officers, who agreed to help, and on August 23, 1877, met the train.

Hardin was spotted with his arm on the sill at one of the open windows, four friends with him. The plan was for Armstrong to enter at the front, the other officers were to come in at the rear, while Duncan was to grab Hardin's arm through the open window. The Ranger, walking with a cane on account of his recent wound, shifted it to his left hand as he entered the car and drew his Frontier Model, Colt .45 in his right hand. Hardin's quick, shifty eyes at once spotted the gun and read the record, exclaiming: "Texas, by God," as he went for his own gun, which, as he drew, hung in his suspenders. One of his companions shot at Armstrong, the bullet going through his hat; Armstrong returned the fire with a bullet through the man's heart. Neither Duncan nor the local officers carried out their part of the plan, which left Armstrong facing the four alone.

By this time he was on top of Hardin, and, determined to take him alive, tore Hardin's gun from his hand, as he, in turn, was kicked backward into the opposite seat. As he came up he tapped Hardin across the head with his own gun, putting him to sleep, disarmed the remaining three, and stowed their guns beneath his belt.

The conductor ran him and his prisoners into Whitney, Alabama. From there Armstrong tersely wired to the Texas Adjutant General, William Steele, that he had arrested Hardin and four others after "some lively shooting. One of their number killed, all the rest captured. Hardin fought desperately, closed in and took him by main strength. . . . We are waiting a train to get away on. This is Hardin's home and his friends are trying to rally men to release him . . . will make it interesting."

At Montgomery, the capital, Armstrong was held up pending extradition as well as over the legal

Continued on page 15

CHRISTIANDOM'S FIRST NEW WORLD MARTYR

Whenever strong men venture into an unknown region, where beings alike in nature and temperament are nonexistent, they court a special, inescapable kind of disaster.

Such disaster – deplorable by the standards of Christian ethical teaching, and yet often inspiring in terms of worth to later generations – befell a courageous man of God who called himself Frey Padre Juan de Padilla. This man trekked into the vast high plains of western Texas with the great explorer, Coronado, to meet a dark fate similar to that of Jesus Christ – slain mercilessly by those whom he sought to help. Padilla was the first Christian martyr to fall at the hands of North American Indians.

This fearless Franciscan monk, attired in the brown cassocks of his Spanish religious order, had forsaken the security and intimacy of his native Spain to brave a hostile New World. From Mexico, he and Coronado and his entourage had made their way across the barren lands of Arizona and New Mexico in 1541, arriving in the Texas Panhandle to make camp. In Palo Duro Canyon they came upon a simple people – the Tejas Indians (from the word *Tejas,* meaning friendly, was derived the word, *Texas*).

Here Coronado's company observed Ascension Day religious services, and then struck out on a trip to the north in search of the fabled "seven cities of gold." They found the cities, but the huts were made of mud, not gold. This place they called Quivira.

Soon the band left Quivira. Padilla had enjoyed success with the natives, and promised them he would return to establish his church. A year later, Padilla borrowed a horse, a few mules and sheep from Coronado, hired two guides, and went on his own back toward Quivira where he established a mission.

The Quivirans were a receptive group, and Padilla met with much success in teaching his religion. It was at this point that he heard of another tribe called the Guas, who lived nearby. The Guas were enemies of the Quivirans, and Padilla was warned of their enmity. Nevertheless, he set out across the Kansas plains to carry Christianity to them. A few of his Indian workers rode with him.

A few miles from the village, they were attacked. "Flee, my children," he told his workers, "save yourselves, for me ye cannot help. Why should all die together! Run!"

The workers fled. Padilla knelt to pray, but was struck down in the yellow grass, his skull crushed by the blows of the enemy.

Thus was born a legend of truth – a legend that lives on in the hearts of men who treasure bravery and the indomitable spirit of the true frontiersman.

corpus CHRISTI

Corpus Christi – Texas' Sparkling City by the Sea – is a jewel of many facets.

Blessed initially by its strategic location and a limitless supply of sunshine and water, the Gulf Coast city has parlayed these and a diversity of other resources into an intriguing combination of booming industrialization and mushrooming tourism.

It has not been by accident, but by careful and diligent planning, that the city's destined role as the Riviera of the U. S. is nearing fruition. She is one of the fastest growing cities in the nation, and with so many economic assets working for her, chances appear excellent for continued progress.

Richly endowed with color and glamour since her earliest days, Corpus Christi has successfully perpetuated that heritage. Her history has been molded by such colorful personalities as Alverez Alonzo de Pineda, Cabeza de Vaca and LaSalle – all explorers of the first realm. The galleons of Hernando Cortez – Spanish soldier, explorer and conqueror of Mexico – appeared in the bay as did the vessels of Pierre and Jean Lafitte and their freebooting pirate bands. U. S. troops of Gen. Zachary Taylor penned a chapter of the area's history as referees in a dispute with the Mexican government.

It was on Festival Day of Corpus Christi – reputed to have been first proclaimed by Pope Urban IV in 1264 – that Pineda first sailed into the blue waters of Corpus Christi Bay in 1519. The bay was named in honor of the day and the city adopted the name at a later date.

The Spanish, Portuguese, English and French alternated in making port in Corpus Christi Bay, but it was not until 1838-39 that Col. Henry Lawrence Kinney, an adventurer-impresario-colonizer, and his partner, William Aubrey, established Kinney's Trading Post on the site of the present city.

The trading post remained an obscure settlement until July, 1845, when U. S. troops under Gen.

Taylor arrived on the scene. The land south of the Nueces River, it seemed, was claimed by both Texas and Mexico following the Texas Revolution in 1836. Gen. Taylor quickly and forcibly deterred any Mexican aspirations of occupying the disputed territory and backed up his stand with cavalry troops until March, 1846, when they marched toward the Rio Grande and bigger arguments with the Mexicans.

An officer in Taylor's army, writing home prior to embarking for conflict in the Mexican War, said of the post at Corpus Christi: "... It contains few women and no ladies." Tempered by the times, it was a lawless and hardbitten settlement – incongruous with its name, which, interpreted from the Spanish, means "Corpse – or body – of Christ."

Corpus Christi has registered considerable progress since those fearless frontier days. During the decade of the 1940's, Corpus Christi grew faster than any other major city in the United States – from 57,000 to 108,000. Census takers counted 167,690 noses in 1960 and that count has increased since to about 180,000 for the city and 220,000 for Nueces County.

As is the case in any rapid and sustained growth, there must be a reason. For Corpus Christi, that reason appears to be its fortunate location – a proximity to easy transportation and limitless resources. Without them, Corpus Christi would be just another Gulf Coast city.

Through the city's ports annually are funneled millions of tons of products – from the city's manufacturing plants, the lush farm and ranch land in the area, and the Gulf of Mexico's rich fishing waters. Underlying it all is an abundant sea of oil and gas.

Add to these sources of income a mammoth shipping business, the influence of two military establishments, and a multi-million-dollar tourist trade and the formula is complete for a thriving economy.

More than 300 days of growing season and an average of 26 inches of rainfall each year make the rich land around Corpus Christi highly productive in agricultural goods. Ranching flourishes south and west of the metropolitan area where rainfall often drops too low to encourage row crop farming. The bounds of the King Ranch, proclaimed the world's largest, come close to Corpus Christi, but its headquarters lie thirty miles to the southwest near Kingsville. The sprawling King domain of nearly a million acres boasts 400 miles of roads, 1,500 miles of fence, more than 800 employees and upwards of 85,000 head of cattle annually. It was here that the Santa Gertrudis breed of cattle was developed as a part of the ranch's extensive and intensive stock improvement program.

Fishing – both as a vocation and an avocation – means big income for Corpus Christi. Around 15 million pounds of shrimp are landed yearly at Aransas Pass across the bay, then frozen in Corpus Christi for shipment inland. It has been conservatively estimated that 65 million pounds of fish are taken from the Gulf near the city each year.

Charter boats for avocational angling are available at Corpus Christi, Port Aransas, Aransas Pass, Rockport and other coastal towns in the area. Rock jetties jutting into the bay are available for those who prefer to do their fishing from *terra firma.* Or Horace Caldwell Pier at Port Aransas and Bob Hall Pier on Padre Island southwest of Corpus Christi, man-made structures reaching 1,400 and 1,200 feet respectively into the blue waters of the bay, afford free 24-hour fishing facilities.

The land and sea at Corpus Christi also yield other invaluable products – oil and gas. The first gas well in the area was brought in on September 6, 1913, at White Point on the north shore of Nueces Bay. Today the area boasts more than 700 oil and gas fields with more than 20,000 wells producing a daily oil allowable of about 675,000 barrels.

american riviera

Most petroleum production around Corpus Christi is from onshore wells. But the appearance of offshore platforms in increasing numbers indicates additional production is forthcoming. Already, petroleum constitutes the bulk of shipments from the port of Corpus Christi.

As a port, Corpus Christi is a water gateway to the Southwest, Northern Mexico and other inland American points. Ranking ninth in the nation, the port annually handles in excess of 25 million tons of products.

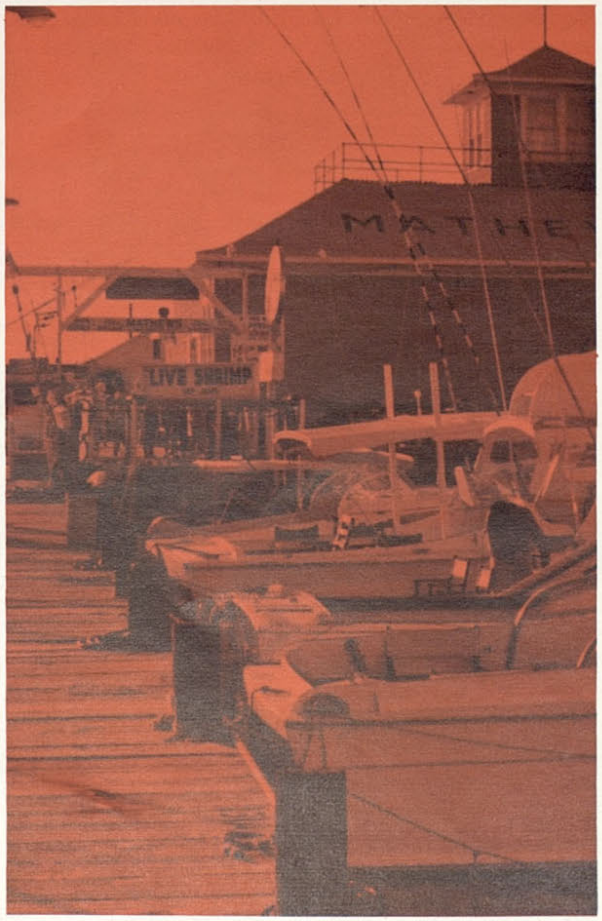
Shipping facilities were greatly enhanced in 1959 with the construction of a new high-level bridge over the port channel. Built at a cost of $18 million, the new span – largest in Texas – is 5,817 feet long, has an over-all height of 235 feet and a free vertical clearance of 140 feet. The channel under the bridge is 400 feet wide, allowing a considerably wider berth for ships than the previous limited clearance of 97 feet that tended to bottleneck traffic to and from the port.

It is ironic that with all the water adjacent to the city, Corpus Christi's growth was threatened a few years ago by a lack of industrial and domestic water. But the city's progressive citizens, alert to the gravity of the situation, pushed through the construction of the Wesley Seale Dam north of the city. The structure was completed in 1958 and assured the city an ample supply of fresh water from Lake Corpus Christi, the largest fresh water body in Texas.

Corpus Christi has its share of military activity. The U. S. Naval Air Station, where all naval aviators at one time or another come to train, and the United States Army Aeronautical Maintenance Center, designed to handle the overhaul of all types of planes and helicopters, pour immense payrolls into the area's economy.

Tourists – and there are thousands every year – never find themselves without something to do or some place to go while in Corpus Christi. With a mean annual temperature of 74.7 degrees, the South Texas city is rapidly taking its place as a tourist mecca in both winter and summer. Among the

This unique seawall separates Corpus Christi from the bay.



Aransas Pass is well known as the Deep Sea Fishing Capital.

factors contributing to this trend have been the Cuban crisis in Miami, an influx of seaweed on the beaches at Galveston caused by Hurricane Carla, and, last but not least, Corpus Christi's unsullied reputation as a "no tourist trap" city.

It often has been said that one can scarcely tell a tourist from a businessman in the city. Sports shirts and Bermuda shorts are popular attire with native and visitor alike.

Bob Conwell, executive vice president of the Corpus Christi Area Convention and Tourist Bureau, said the 1962-63 winter was the best tourist season in the city's history. Those who journey to Corpus Christi to escape the winter's icy blasts in more northern climes and those who enjoy summer vacations in the area annually leave from $20 to $30 million with Corpus Christi merchants. Thus it is easy to see why the city deems the tourist trade worthy of wooing.

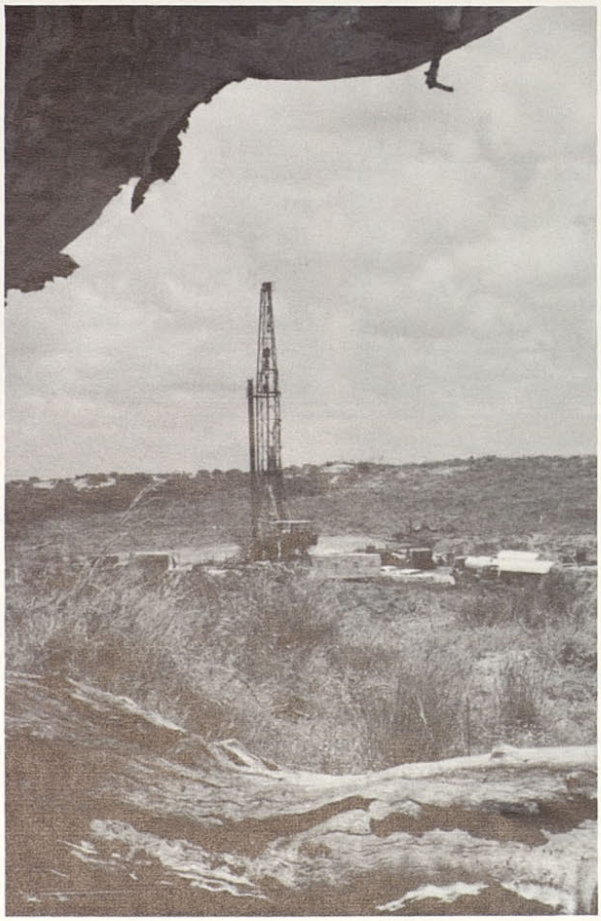
Corpus Christi hasn't put all her eggs in the tourist and industrial baskets, however. She has maintained a weather eye on the cultural aspects of living.

Advanced educational facilities include the University of Corpus Christi, a four-year liberal arts college; Del Mar College, a two-year junior college; and Dougherty School of Nursing.

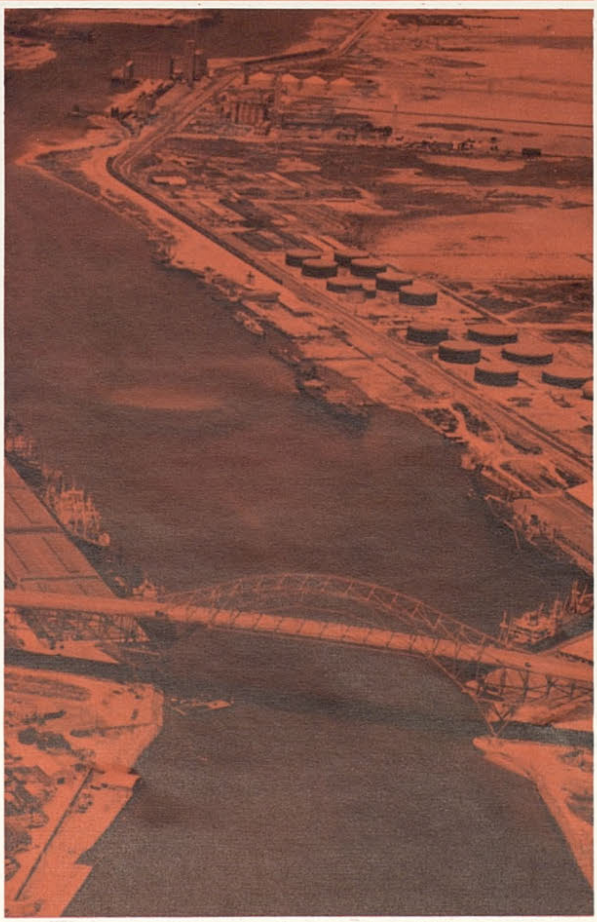
Art, dramatic and literary groups are extremely active in the cultural life of the city. Corpus Christi Museum contains many wildlife, historic and educational exhibits that appeal to both youngsters and adults. Works of leading artists in the area as well as displays of national scope often are exhibited at the Centennial Art Museum.

Sunless days are a rarity in Corpus Christi. And with more than 130 miles of sun-kissed beach available in the vicinity, outdoor living is at its best.

It's no secret that the sea water temperature at Corpus Christi is higher the year around than at California, Florida or Mediterranean winter resort areas. So while Corpus Christi is now known as the Sparkling City by the Sea, the Miracle City, Convention Capital, or Vacation City, don't be surprised if it soon is recognized as "Corpus Christi, The American Riviera."



Oil plays a big part in the Corpus Christi area economy.



This new bridge spans the nation's ninth largest port.

padre

Twentieth Century Treasure Island

There's an adage that visitors to Padre Island either love it or loathe it. It all depends on what they expect of the 110-mile stretch of sand and surf.

Here, on a lonely sliver of land curving southwestward along the Texas Gulf Coast, is one of the last remaining outposts of undisturbed isolation in the continental United States. Vacationers throng to the island, lured by the rustic charms of outdoor living, fishing, beachcombing and treasure hunting.

Those who come to Padre Island expecting luxurious accommodations ordinarily associated with resort areas usually are disappointed. Those who anticipate a communion with nature in its rawest environs seldom are disillusioned.

Mrs. Inman Scott of Midwest City, Okla., enjoys the sun and sand of Padre with son, David, and daughter, Marion.

Lighted for day and night fishing, Bob Hall Pier is one of the most popular spots for visitors to Padre Island.

Basically uninhabited except at its extremes, Padre Island stretches from near Corpus Christi to Port Isabel just off Mexico. Between Padre Park on the north and Isla Blanca Park on the south are more than 80 miles of sparkling beaches, rolling surf and shifting sand dunes, proclaimed in the fall of 1962 as a National Seashore to "preserve the natural state of the land."

The island was the domain of the savage Karankawan Indians when the first Spanish fleet sailed along the beach in 1519. Its bleak expanse of sand offered little inducement to permanent settlement until Padre Nicolas Ballie, a Spanish priest for whom the island was named, obtained sovereign rights to the land in 1800 and introduced extensive grazing operations with longhorns and mustangs.

The most colorful chapters of the island's history, however, were written in the era of wooden ships and golden cargos – when bold pirates plied the high seas and stashed their loot in Padre's sandy secrets. Most notable of the freebooters who frequented Padre Island were the Lafittes – Pierre and Jean – who allegedly left fabulous fortunes buried there.

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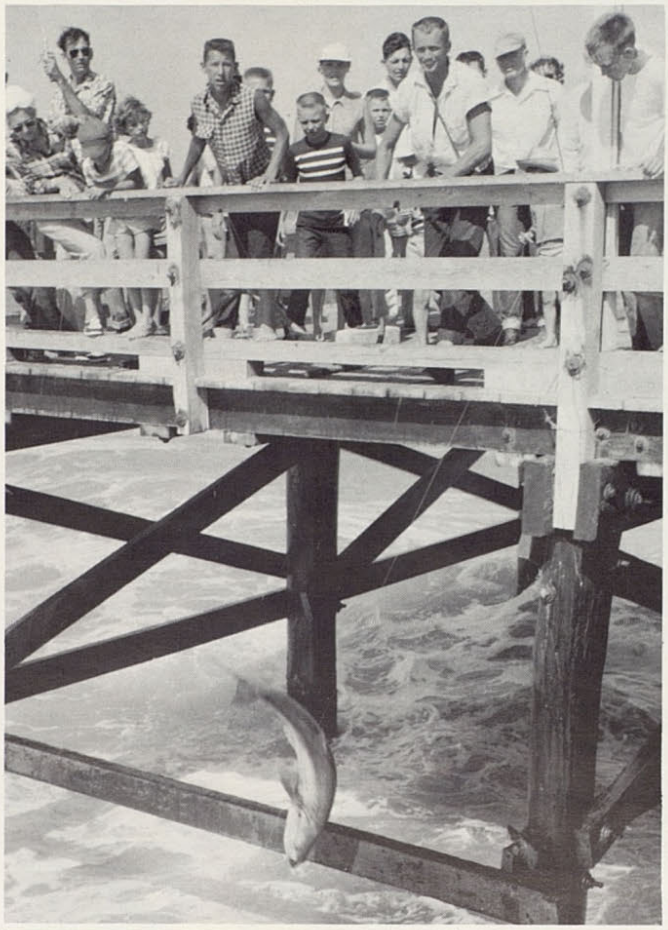

Tarpon, one of the gamest of all deep sea fish, live to fight again after being landed by Padre Island anglers.

Other treasures attract gold-seekers to Padre, too. Somewhere in the bowels of the ever-shifting sand dunes and beneath the tide-swept beaches lie treasures valued at millions – gold coins intended for shipment from Mexico to Spain, but scuttled by fierce tropical storms. Here, too, is believed to be a family treasure hidden from carpetbaggers during the War Between the States.

It's an ill wind that blows no one some good, and in 1961, Hurricane Carla reshaped many of the dunes and uncovered a number of valuable coins. She also revealed the wreckage of several old ships and fired treasure seeking to a fever pitch.

The island's legendary family treasure dates to the Civil War. A small town founded by Padre Ballie contained some 15 buildings, including the home of John V. Singer, a brother of the sewing machine king. Singer was forced to flee from advancing Yankee troops, but before leaving he allegedly buried the family treasure valued at $80,000.

Most of the buildings were torn down for firewood by the occupying troops, levelling the town. Hurricane winds in the ensuing years piled sand over the ruins to obliterate all traces of its existence. Neither the town nor the buried treasure have ever been found.

The search for riches continues on Padre Island. Thousands annually discover wealths of enjoyment on beach outings and fishing jaunts. Other thousands – amateur and professional gold-seekers alike – pursue their dreams of finding instant wealth in sunken treasures.

Maybe someday someone will uncover the millstone on which Jean Lafitte is reputed to have carved two words of advice – "dig deeper." Legend has it that a fabulous fortune lies beneath.

A vacation on Padre Island can be fun. It could be profitable, too.

detail that he had taken Hardin and his companions without a warrant. But at last he was happily on his way with the most noted gunman Texas had ever produced – the son of a Methodist minister who was said to have "killed twenty-five or thirty men, not counting Mexicans and Negroes." If anything more could have been needed, Armstrong's single-handed exploit had proven that he was completely worthy of McNelly's mantle.

John Armstrong shortly left the service to marry Molly Durst, the daughter of Texas pioneers. In 1882 he returned to the border country to establish a 50,000-acre cow ranch below King and Kenedy's wide domain, in the sandy grasslands that he had helped recover from outlaws for the State of Texas.

In 1890 he undertook to promote a railroad from Corpus Christi to Brownsville, but saw it lost in the panic of 1893. He renewed his efforts in 1900, becoming a director of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico line when it was built. He was commissioned an officer in the Texas Volunteer Guard in 1891, and thereafter was known as "Major" Armstrong. He died on the first of May, 1913.

His strong convictions were seasoned with a sense of humor and mellowed with rare human warmth. He had built his home on the ranch, eighty-five miles from town, where, with genteel decorum, in keeping with his Southern breeding – albeit far removed from his rough life as the greatest of McNelly's men – he raised a remarkable family.

Time changes but the land he took does not. The ranch that bears his name runs on, strong in the tradition that sustained the men who first rode across it as Texas Rangers.[2]

[2]The writer is indebted to Mr. J. M. Bennett, Sr., of San Antonio, and especially to Major Armstrong's daughter, Mrs. Andrew Stewart, of Oak Allee Plantation, Vacherie, Louisiana, for recollections and documentary material relating to this famous Ranger.

COVER STORY

Water plays a big part in the everyday drama of Corpus Christi, Texas' Gulf Coast city of many complexions. Ships ply it daily for profit and pleasure; thousands swim in it; fishermen gain livelihood and diversion from it. It also provides this setting from a T-head in Corpus Christi Bay for a late afternoon panoramic view of a rocketing skyline.

SHAMROCK

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