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 Title: The Origin of the Texas Trails

Author: By NORMAN ROZEFF Special to the Star

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# The Origin of the Texas Trails

## Part II: Start of the Tropical Trail

By **NORMAN ROZEFF**  
Special to the Star

**A**s early as 1968 the Texas Highway Department had erected its blue and white roadside signs noting the Tropical Trail along some highways in South Texas and undertook some marketing efforts. Over time interest in the Texas Travel Trails waned. Then, with a downturn in tourism after the 9/11 attacks, the **Texas Historical Commission** (THC) took steps to reinvigorate them. Cheryl LaBerge, who was one of the local leaders in this effort, was kind enough to furnish me information for this portion of the article.

Janie Headrick, director of THC's Heritage Tourism, and other THC staff promoted the idea of reviving the Tropical Trail at two workshops designed to enhance and encourage heritage tourism and preservation efforts in South Texas. The first was in Harlingen at the old Rialto Theater on February

26, 2002; the second was November 21-22, 2002 in Rio Grande City.

LaBerge, then with the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce and Mary Lou Rumbo, then president of the Harlingen Historical Preservation Society, attended both. Together they generated enough interest to schedule a Tropical Trail organizational meeting, held in Alice on September 18, 2003. Twenty-five were in attendance from across South Texas.

The Harlingen contingent agreed to serve as organizational contacts and coordinators for the region.

The task they took on would be daunting as all 20 counties in the original Tropical Trail region were required to actively participate in order to gain THC approval and funding.

These twenty were Aransas, Brooks, Cameron, Dimmit, Duval, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, San Patricio, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata.

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If all 20 counties would pass resolutions of support and a financial commitment of at least

\$10,000/year for three years could be obtained from across the region, THC would pay for a regional coordinator for three years (estimated at (\$50,000/year) and for design and printing of 500,000 color tourist brochures.

Joseph Muniz with the Harlingen Library maintained an ever-expanding email list of interested individuals who were kept informed of progress while Jim McKone kept the general public abreast with his columns in the McAllen Monitor.

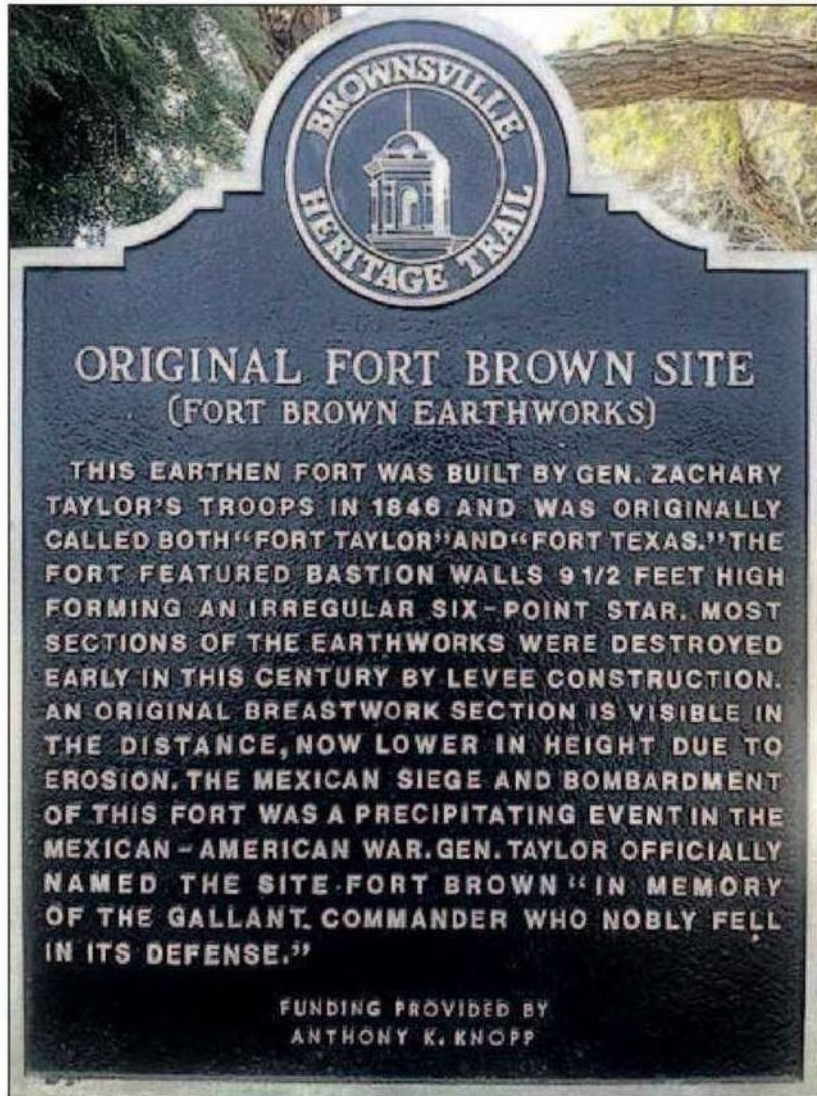
The second organizational meeting was in Premont on November 13, 2003, the third in Edinburg January 7, 2004, the fourth in Falfurrias February 12,

2004 and finally three meetings in Kingsville on 3/11/04, 3/25/04, and 4/8/04.

Key contacts in each county helped in securing the required approvals and financial commitments, along with an impressive 184 letters of support from businesses, civic groups, attractions, tourism agencies, and elected officials. LaBerge compiled these and other required materials, sending the hefty application package to Austin by the May 7, 2004 deadline.

Approval was on July 16, 2004, with the promised appropriation of \$150,000+.

See TRAILS ★ C8



COURTESY PHOTO

THC marker for original Fort Brown site.

## TRAILS

### FROM C6

Other program benefits were to include tourism evaluations of historic and

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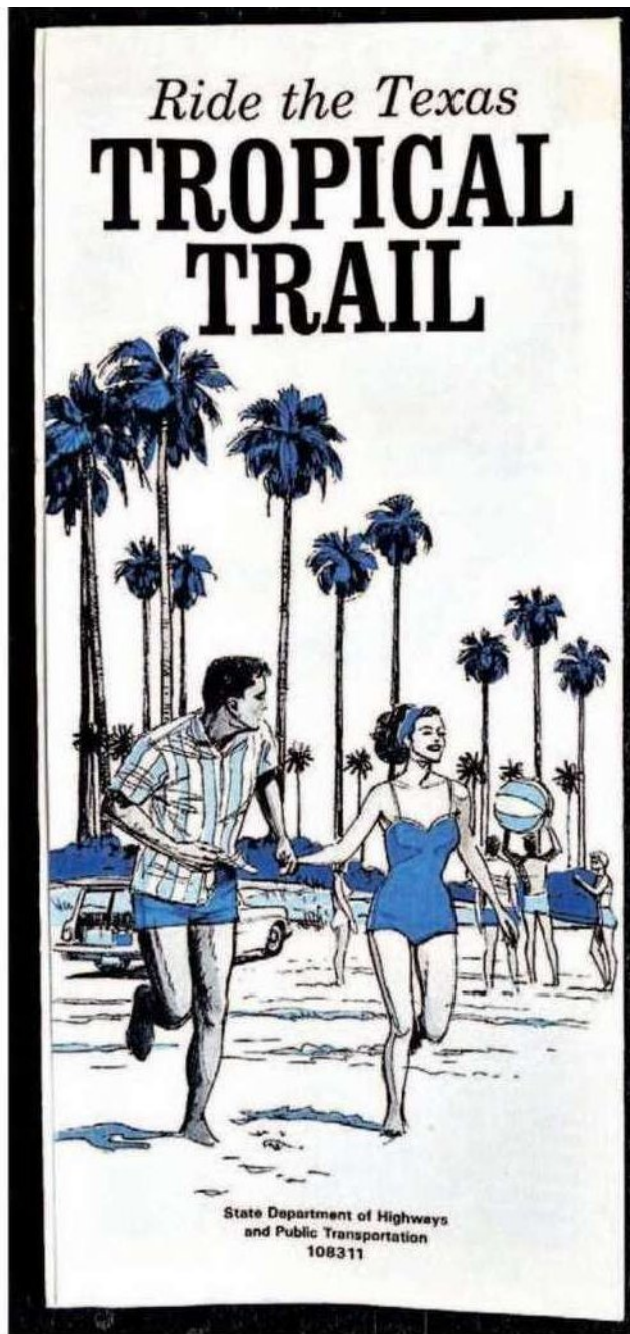
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cultural sites in the region, matching grants for heritage tourism projects, and THC-funded advertising and media placements.

Two statements, one of Vision and a second on Mission were drafted. The first reads, "The Tropical Trail Region's unique attributes and resources will be preserved and developed to create a strong economic impact in our communities." The second states

"The Tropical Trail Region and its partners identify, preserve, interpret, and promote the natural, historic, and cultural resources of South Texas."

Members of the initial Board of Directors were Joey Trevino (chair), Bill Hellen (vice chairman), Nancy Deviney (secretary), Mauro Villarreal (treasurer), Margarita Araiza, Jan Cartwright, Mark Creighton, Hildegardo E. Flores, Jim McKone, Fran Sharpe, and Homero S. Vera. Several have continued to serve this organization over the years.



COURTESY PHOTO

Tropical Trail brochure.