

JCHC JOURNAL

J E F F E R S O N C O U N T Y H I S T O R I C A L C O M M I S S I O N

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

- March 15, 2023
10:00 a.m.
- March 28, 2023,
special meeting
2:00 p.m. Agriculture Auditorium
- May 17, 2023 10:00 a.m.
- July 19, 2023 10:00 a.m.
- September 20, 2023 10:00 a.m.
- November 15, 2023

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WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH: A PROFILE OF GLORIA DEVORE SCHWAGER

Theresa Goodness

According to the [Jeanette Mulder Greer Papers](#) on file at the Tyrrell Historical Library, in the 1950's television station KFDM hired Gloria Devore (later Schwager), a Fort Worth native (born October 15, 1920) to be its first meteorologist. At the time the station was located on Calder Avenue in Beaumont and developed various programming shows, including *Woman's World (1955-1960)*, a cooking show hosted by Ms. Devore and filmed live before a studio audience. Ms. Devore presented the weather report on air with news anchor, Ralph Ramos, utilizing visualization aids such as a map of the United States and a black marker to illustrate forecasted weather patterns, precipitation, and temperatures.

Prior to her arrival in Beaumont, Gloria Devore graduated from the University of California, in Los Angeles, California. According to the [Women Airforce Service Pilots Official Archive](#) held at Texas Women's University, she went on to join the ranks of Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII (WASP) aviators graduating April 15, 1944, in the Class of 44-3 which had 57 graduates. Training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, she learned to fly various aircraft including BT-13's, PT-17's, AT-6's, B17's and B-26's. After graduation, Ms. Devore was assigned to Newport Army Air Field in Arkansas, Shaw Army Air Base in Sumter, S.C. and Buckingham Army Air Field in Fort Myers, Florida, where she flew daily flights to Cuba.

In 1977, three decades later, Congress held hearings to determine whether W.A.S.P.s were entitled to veterans' benefits. Ms. Devore Schwager submitted a statement to Congress dated September 4, 1977, detailing her time serving as a test pilot, her orders to report to Orlando, Florida, for Officer's Training "to prepare her for becoming an officer in the Army Air Force", and the completion of her training which included courses on Military Law, Aircraft Identification, and jungle survival. She was required to wear a uniform at all times. After training she was ordered to Buckingham Air Force Base and was assigned to fly the B-26 daily to Cuba and back for the duration

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of her duty, after which she was honorably discharged. On November 23, 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the G.I. Bill Improvement Act which included an amendment to recognize W.A.S.P. service as active duty in the armed forces and entitled them to veterans' benefits.

Per her obituary on [Find A Grave](#), Ms. Devore Schwager's media career spanned over thirty years from opening the first television station in Dallas, to being a meteorologist in Beaumont, and other media jobs in cities such as Amarillo, Houston, and Biloxi, Mississippi. She was listed in the 1961 edition of Who's Who in American Women in the field of Television/Radio and was a member of the American Meteorologist Association. She passed away January 25, 1999, in Gulfport, Mississippi, and was survived by her husband, Henry Schwager; a son, Chris Rochester of Paris; and three grandchildren.



A photograph of Gloria Devore. She was the first meteorologist at KFDM-TV. She broadcast the weather forecast for the television station during the late 1950's and 1960's. She is seen standing with a marker pencil in her hand and a United States map appearing directly behind her that includes the particular day's weather patterns drawn out on it.

Photo Credit: Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, Texas. Provenance: Jeanette Mulder Greer Papers

Identifier: AC685-001-029-002



A photograph of Gloria Devore. She also hosted the local television program "Woman's World" that was a cooking show. She is seen with another woman on the set of the cooking show. A camera appears to be filming the show live with an audience seated in chairs viewing it.

Photo Credit: Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, Texas. Provenance: Jeanette Mulder Greer Papers.

Identifier: AC685-001-029-004



A photograph of Ralph Ramos (news) and Gloria Devore (weather) at the KFDM-TV studio. They appear to be holding paper with printed text on it in their hands.

Photo Credit: Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, Texas. Provenance: Jeanette Mulder Greer Papers

Identifier: AC685-001-029-001



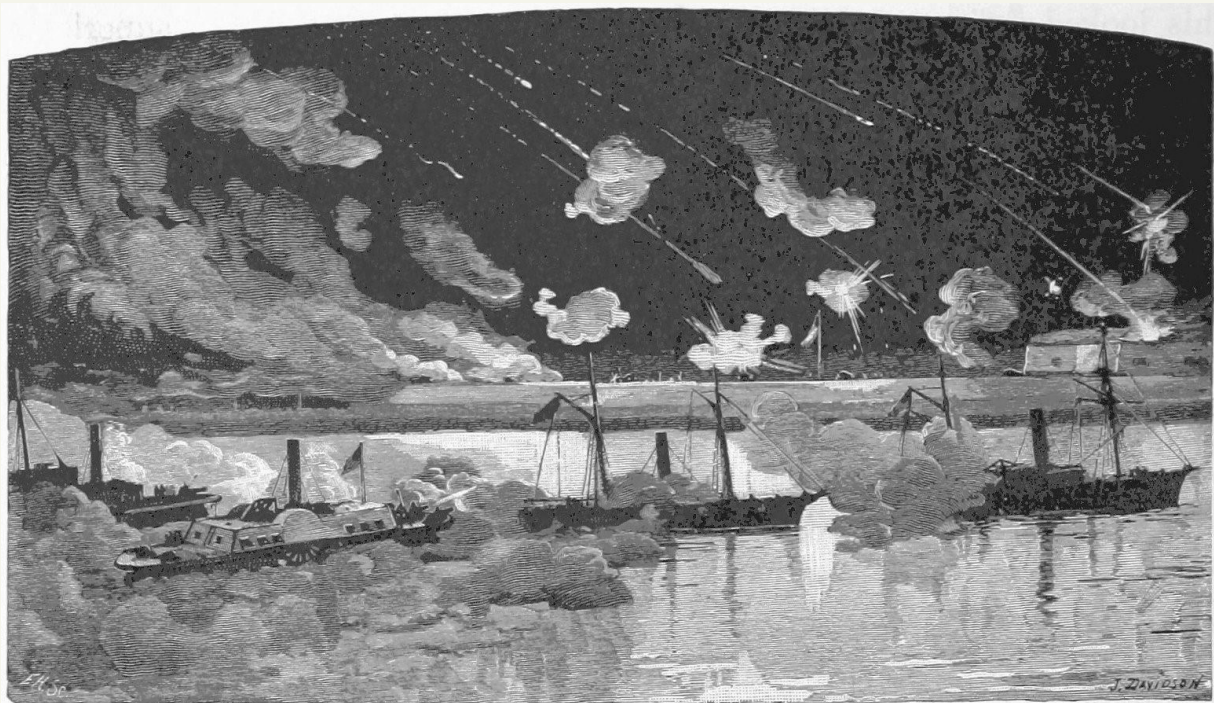
A photograph of several women who worked in the radio and television industry during the 1950's. Some of the women are seen seated on a sofa with others standing behind the sofa. Those identified seated (left to right) include the following: Joyce [Crab]; Jeanette Mulder (KFDM Radio and Television); Helen F. Caldwell (KFDM Radio and Television); and a unidentified woman. And those identified standing (left to right) include the following: Elva Duby (bookkeeper at KTET Radio); Gloria Devore (KFDM Television); and Betty F. Klein (program director at KOTG Radio).

Photo Credit: Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, Texas. Provenance: Jeanette Mulder Greer Papers.

Identifier: AC685-001-028-002

CLIFTON— WARTIME SERVICE, PART 1

MATT REEVES



"CLIFTON" AND "WESTFIELD," ALTERED NEW YORK CITY FERRY-BOATS. "OWASCO." "HARRIET LANE."

MORTAR-STEAMERS ATTACKING THE WATER-BATTERY OF FORT JACKSON.

Having been outfitted for war service, Clifton quickly received her first assignment. On January 31, 1862, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles ordered Clifton's commander, Acting Lieutenant CH Baldwin, to report to Commander David Dixon Porter. She would be assigned to Porter's Mortar Flotilla, a constituent unit of Admiral David G. Farragut's West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Westfield's commander received a copy of these same orders, marking the beginning of the sister ships' service together along the Louisiana and Texas coasts.

Clifton and Westfield would soon participate in the capture of New Orleans, arguably the most important city in the Confederacy next to Richmond. The Mortar Flotilla, also called the bomb flotilla in official reports, was to provide the main effort against two large, powerfully-armed masonry fortifications, Jackson and St. Philip, guarding the Mississippi River approach to New Orleans. Though the mortars had performed disappointingly at the battle of Island Number Ten in March 1862, Porter assured Farragut that his mortars would demolish the Confederate forts, allowing Farragut to sail past them in safety to force the surrender of the city.

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Clifton would be tardy in joining the fleet, as she collided with the steamer USS R.B. Forbes during a storm off the North Carolina coast, and had to put in at Baltimore for repairs. The damage was significant, as she was reported to be taking on 18 to 20 inches of water while at anchor. Both Clifton and Westfield, along with several other gunboats, encountered significant damage during their southern journey from New York due to a succession of storms and high winds.

After being repaired, Clifton sailed to Key West, Florida, where she was finally assigned to the Mortar Flotilla. By mid-March 1862, she was on station at South West Pass. She and Westfield were immediately put to work towing Porter's mortar schooners across the Mississippi River bar, and within eight hours they

had assisted 21 of the vessels into the river. They also assisted several large, regular navy steamers across the bar. Porter had high praise for the services rendered by these two vessels, and later assigned them to guard the schooners against Confederate rams (steamboats equipped with iron or heavy wooden prows intended to attack United States ships by deliberately ramming them), torpedoes (floating kegs of black powder fitted with contact fuses), and fire rafts.

The mortar bombardment commenced on April 18, 1862, and lasted several days. Though the firing was intense, and much damage was done to the CS forts and their supporting batteries, their fighting capacity was only marginally diminished. Farragut therefore decided to make a run past the forts toward the city with his cruisers, leaving the bomb flotilla to continue their bombardment. Part of this plan involved silencing a six-gun CS battery below Fort Jackson, and this action would be Clifton's first combat.

As Farragut's command steamed upriver on the early morning of April 24, Clifton, along with Westfield and the other supporting gunboats attached to the mortar fleet, commenced their attack on the rebel battery. It was silenced with no harm done to either Clifton or Westfield, and once Farragut was past the forts, United States victory was almost certain. An initial demand for surrender of the forts was denied, and the mortar bombardment resumed. Ironically, the bombardment's main effect was to prompt a mutiny by the garrison, and Porter received their surrender. It was Clifton that bore news of the surrender to the rest of the bomb flotilla on the morning of April 28, her signals prompting cheers from the fleet. Clifton then assisted the army in landing troops to occupy the forts.

Clifton would later host several Confederate prisoners, including Commander John K. Mitchell, commander of CS naval forces on the Lower Mississippi. In a letter written aboard Clifton while she was moored in New Orleans in May 1862, Mitchell complained of the denial of "comforts and consideration.. as prisoners of war." His treatment resulted from a fiasco involving the surrender of the forts. CSS Louisiana, a powerful-armed and armored but unfinished ironclad, had been

moored a short distance above Fort St. Philip as a floating battery during the battle. When Farragut made his run past the forts, their garrisons, under army command, surrendered to Porter's flotilla. As

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Louisiana was under Mitchell's naval command, he did not feel obligated to abide by the surrender terms and decided to scuttle Louisiana rather than surrender her. She was set afire, and after drifting downriver, her magazine violently exploded. As the blast was large enough that it could have destroyed any vessel unfortunate enough to be nearby, Mitchell was suspected of orchestrating this incident as an act of war against the United States and was therefore held aboard Clifton as a criminal rather than a prisoner of war. Despite this incident, several of the CS prisoners aboard Clifton swore the oath of allegiance to the United States and entered service with the United States Navy.

Though she played only a supporting role at New Orleans, Clifton had rendered valuable service in her first combat assignment, and within weeks she would engage Confederate river batteries at Vicksburg.

Sources

Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, series I, volume 18. Retrieved from Cornell University, "Making of America," https://collections.library.cornell.edu/moa_new/ofre.html. Accessed February 16, 2023.

PORT ARTHUR, TEXAS CELEBRATES THE QUASQUICENTENNIAL OF CITY'S INCORPORATION

The City of Port Arthur's 125th anniversary of the date of incorporation is rapidly approaching and the City has appointed a Commission to plan events to celebrate throughout the year. Proposed ideas include a large event for May 28th, the City's official birthday, as well as a possible city-wide celebration in October. The History Committee has been diligently gathering information on resources including

- ◇ Resources at the Port Arthur Library History Center
- ◇ Newspaper articles regarding various time capsules in the city and their contents, when buried and when scheduled to be opened, if not already.
- ◇ Souvenirs from past celebrations
- ◇ Articles related to Port Arthur from local publications including the JCHC Journal

The first of four quarterly displays has been put up in the foyer of the Port Arthur Library next to the entrance door to the library. Special thanks to Les McMahan for keeping the JCHC up-to-date with the Port Arthur Celebration!

USS TEXAS IN DRY DOCK

PAUL PROSPERIE



Photo Credit: RediscoveringSETX.com

Like many others in this area, I toured the *U.S.S. Texas* while at San Jacinto, and I would love to help keep this treasure afloat. Now that Beaumont is in the running to be a host city, and there is a real possibility that we could bring her here. This is something we really need to focus on because it won't be easy. Before we get into the future of *Old Hoodoo*, let us look back to her origins.

The *U.S.S. Texas* is a New York-class battleship that was approved by Congress to be built in 1910, laid down in 1911, launched in 1912, and commissioned in 1914. She was the first to have ten 14-inch guns. While she was the most potent weapon in the world at the time, as they say, today's powerful weapon is tomorrow's outdated pea shooter. She served in World War I and World War II, where she escorted war convoys across the Atlantic, shelled the enemy at Normandy on D-day, and provided naval gunfire support during the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Serving in two world wars, she only had one casualty killed in the line of duty, Christen Christensen, the helmsman on duty June 25, 1944 at Cherbourg, France. The *Texas* was firing on German positions at the port when a German 24-cm shell skidded over the top of the conning tower and exploded. There were 11 injured in the blast, but Christensen succumbed to his wounds.

The *U.S.S. Texas* was decommissioned in 1948 and was the first permanent battleship memorial museum in the U.S., operating under the direction of the Battleship Texas Commission, which the Texas Legislature established to care for its safe upkeep. In 1983, she was turned over to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, due to mismanagement and neglect among the leadership of the Battleship Texas Commission. The *Texas* was moved to a dry dock in 1988, and repairs were made.

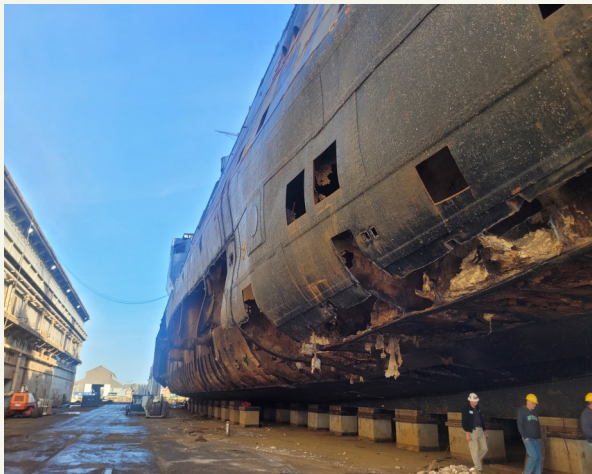
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This brings us to the past few years. Over time, the *Texas* has taken in water, and it has been bad — about 1500 gallons per minute bad — but two years ago, the Foundation that now runs the *Texas* agreed to put foam in the hull to cut down on the leakage. The water intake went from 1500 to 50 gallons per minute. This is good news for a stationary ship, but if you’ve seen the video of her being moved, there were a lot of nervous people on that day. She could have sunk, but fortunately, she made it to dry dock, where she is today.

As far as I know, they are only considering three places: Beaumont, Baytown, and Galveston. All have good and bad points, but ultimately, the most important thing is what is best for the U.S.S. *Texas*. First and foremost, she will be out of dry dock no later than June 1, 2023. After that, we will not know where the Battleship Texas Foundation plans to dock her until the awarded city can begin construction on its part of the agreement. I am certain they have a plan, but I find it odd that they should have made a decision already.

So, what are the pros and the cons of each proposed site? Certainly, Galveston is the most popular tourist attraction, but it is hard to get to. If the ship is moored along Interstate 10, it would be much easier to reach. That is a plus for Baytown and Beaumont. Another problem is keeping her in salt water. I was told recently that, if the maintenance is kept up, this would not be a problem, but if history repeats itself, I am concerned. Lastly, I am biased and will state that, in Beaumont, the water, although not pure, is not salty. Further, there is a lot of potential to make this a great place to visit. What say you, Beaumont?



USS Texas in Dry Dock at Galveston.

February 19, 2023

Photo Credit: RediscoveringSETX.com



Work in progress on the hull of the USS Texas.

February 19, 2023

Photo Credit: RediscoveringSETX.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **March 3, 2023 Tyrrell Historical Library** 10:00 a.m. 695 Pearl Street, Beaumont. “Genealogy Days” Receive one-on-one genealogy assistance from a member of the Colonel George Moffett Chapter of the DAR.
- **March 4, 2023 Museum of the Gulf Coast** 10:00 a.m. 700 Procter Street, Port Arthur. “Free Family Fun Day” visit museumofthegulfcoast.org/events for more information
- **March 5, 2023 McFaddin-Ward House** 1906 McFaddin Street, Beaumont. SOAR Festival which will kick off the inaugural butterfly-themed, month-long community outreach celebration. Please visit mcfaddin-ward.org/events/
- **March 10, 2023 McFaddin-Ward House** 6:30 p.m. 1906 McFaddin Street, Beaumont. “Music at the McFaddin’s” featuring “Back Porch Friends”
- **March 16, 2023 Beaumont Community Players** 5:30 p.m. 4155 Laurel Avenue “Heritage Happy Hour” with the Beaumont Heritage Society
- **March 30, 2023 McFaddin-Ward House** 6:30 p.m. 1906 McFaddin Street, Beaumont. “Music at the McFaddin’s” featuring the “Night and Day Orchestra”.
- **April 8, 2023 Beaumont Heritage Society** 1:00 p.m. 3025 French Road, Beaumont. John Jay French Museum Easter Egg Hunt
- **April 12, 2023 Port Arthur Library** 3:00 p.m. “Preservation Week Kickoff” Lucy Stiefel Gallery inside the Port Arthur Public Library, 4516 9th Avenue. Hear about Port Arthur Library’s recovery from Hurricane Harvey and efforts to preserve the history of Jefferson County and how you can preserve your own personal and family history.
- **April 13, 2023 Beaumont Heritage Society** 5:30 p.m. 3025 French Road, Beaumont. John Jay French Museum hosts “Adults After Easter”
- **April 14, 2023 Tyrrell Historical Library** 10:00 a.m. 695 Pearl Street, Beaumont. “Genealogy Days” Receive one-on-one genealogy assistance from a member of the Colonel George Moffett Chapter of the DAR.
- **April 20, 2023 McFaddin-Ward House** 6:30 p.m. 1906 Calder Street, Beaumont. Lecture- “Monuments: Creation of our National Symbols”