

## Seabrook 1900 to 1960

Seabrook, the beautiful new resort village on the western shore of Galveston Bay, was the new hotspot for Houstonians looking for recreation during the summer of 1900. Labor Day signaled the end of the resort season and only the permanent residents were left to enjoy the hot still days of September. Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1900 dawned as another sultry early fall day on Galveston Bay, but by night the terrors of a tremendous hurricane were assaulting the coast. All night tide waters from the gulf raced into the bay, and buildings were torn apart by high winds. As the light of dawn broke on Sunday morning, and the terrifying blanket of darkness lifted as the storm passed the damage caused by the screaming winds and torrents of rain and flooding was revealed. Seabrook was devastated with loss of life and property.

According to the Houston Post, a steamer from Galveston and three bay schooners from the ship channel, all crews missing, were beached on Seabrook's shore. Homes and businesses were washed west and strewn along the shore at the head of Clear Lake. The railroad bridge across Clear Creek channel was washed away. Seventeen Seabrook residents were listed on the official list of storm deaths. Albert Repsdorph who managed the Seabrook hotel drowned, and Mr. Larrabee, the Postmaster, died of exhaustion on Sunday night. Harmon Platzler survived the storm at the Galveston wharves and the next morning he brought other bay shore residents home to survey their damaged properties.

The people who pioneered the area loved their homes on the shore of Galveston Bay and had survived storms before. They immediately began to rebuild. Structures were repaired or replaced, before the year was out life was becoming normal again. Kleinworth's Meat Market opened in 1901. A ferry transported travelers and wagons of goods across the Clear Creek channel. Lute Rammakers opened a new blacksmith shop at Fourth Street and the railroad. By 1905 the railroad bridge was repaired, and Dr. J.T. Oliver opened an office in Seabrook. The new first Methodist Church was conducting services and Rodick's Restaurant and Larrabee's grocery store were open. The town continued to grow and prosper. The Seabrook Hotel on the Bay and the Rugers Hotel on Clear Lake were repaired and reopened. In 1915 another devastating hurricane hit Galveston Bay. The survivors of the 1900 Storm helped to convince newcomers that hurricanes come and go, but living beside the water was what fed the heart of the community, and they would recoup their losses and rebuild.

A special commuter train soon made runs to Houston and back twice a day. A new resort route was constructed along the bay's shore from Sylvan Beach to Seabrook and trains shuttled vacationers between the two resorts. Seabrook was a pleasant village during the winter months and a bustling resort town during the summer. Although the Seabrook Hotel was not rebuilt after the 1915 Storm, the Rugers Hotel was a favorite with Houstonians. The town boasted quite a few thriving businesses now, including a new general merchandise store called Chapman's and Sayre's Drug Store.

After WWI the Ford Motor Company opened an assembly plant in Houston and Model T's began to replace the buggy in Seabrook. In 1923, Dr. S.F. Curry opened his medical

practice. Electricity came to the area in 1927. When the first highway bridge was constructed across the channel and replaced the ferry, businesses opened along the route of the county road, now Highway 146. In 1930 Seabrook's fourth school was built. On the corner of Highway 146 and NASA Road 1 a quaint building called Dickinson Fuel and Ice was built to supply the fishermen with bait and ice as they traveled over the new bridge on their way to fish at Dickinson Bay. It became a Seabrook landmark known best as Curley's Corner. The end of prohibition made Wes Muecke's place the hottest "joint" in town.

Albert Bel and Ernest Bel Fay two brothers with a passion for sailing and shipbuilding purchased sixty acres on the channel called Jennings' Island in 1937, and founded the Seabrook Yacht Corporation and built the Seabrook Shipyard. Both brothers were yacht enthusiasts and both were major competitors in the International 5.5 Meter class. Albert won the U.S. Championship three times, the Scandinavian Gold Cup three times, third place in the World Championship three times and won the World Championship once. Ernest won the U.S. Championship six times, the Scandinavian Gold Cup seven times, placed third in the World Championship three times and won the World Championship once. In 1940, the Fay's bid on and won a Navy contract to build subchasers and rescue or crash boats for use during the war in Europe. At the end of WWII, the Seabrook Shipyard had launched six subchasers and eight crash boats.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hammon, a well known banker and sulfur mining entrepreneur who lived on Todville Road, hired Charles Gilbert to build a community center for Seabrook in 1939. Since the unique log building was opened, it has been used by the entire community. The Seabrook Volunteer Fire Department organized in 1941. A Water and Sewer Department was formed in 1954 and private wells and septic systems and outhouses began to disappear. The Ladies Auxiliary to the fire department formed in 1958 to assist the department in raising funds for equipment. The small resort village of Seabrook had grown into a town just in time to have the city of Houston look their way when the large city began annexing unincorporated areas of Harris County.

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