

Make Your Cemetery Experience Safe and Enjoyable

- Enter Cemetery at Houston Street entrance next to the Fire Hall off Longoria Street. (One block north of First National Bank of Edinburg)
- CAUTION: Watch your head and your step. Be sure not to step on the graves for safety and respect of the site. This is a historic cemetery so almost all spaces are used for grave sites.
- Notice the items used for decoration of the various sites including collectibles, items the deceased enjoyed, toys, shells, and artwork.
- Images of local life are apparent through the use of images such as shrimp boats and lighthouses.
- A number of grave markers are custom made by the families to reflect the personality of the deceased. For example, there is a site that has a concrete hat and boots representing a father.
- Many of the older grave sites are located toward the center. They date from the 1890s, the oldest dating from the 1880s (Champion Family Plot).

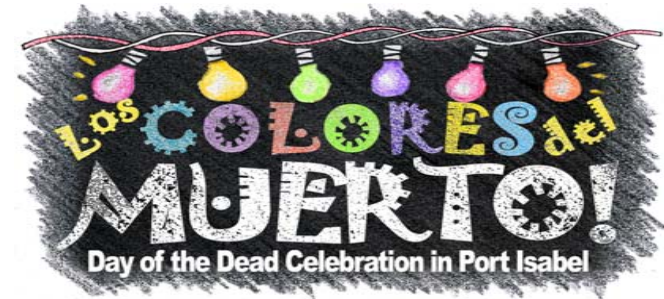


The mission of the Museums of Port Isabel is to collect, preserve and interpret the art, history and culture of the Port Isabel and the Laguna Madre area through educational exhibits, programs, and events.

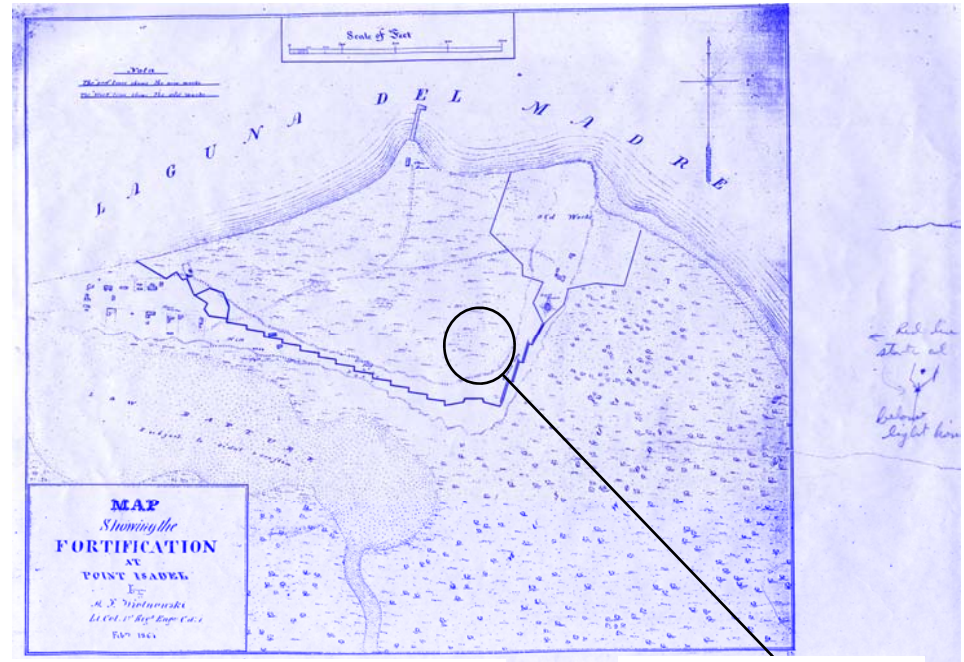
The Museums of Port Isabel include the Port Isabel Historical Museum, the Treasures of the Gulf Museum, and the Port Isabel Lighthouse complex.

For more information call (956) 943-7602 or logon to www.portisabelmuseums.com

CEMETERY TOUR



Saturday, October 31, 2009



Point Isabel Fortification 1860s

Site of Grave Yard c. 1860

Historic Point Isabel Cemetery

Museums of Port Isabel

Port Isabel Cemetery

Encompassing almost one acre of land, the **Port Isabel Cemetery** is located on property granted to Don Rafael Garcia by the Government of Mexico in 1829. The land was known as the Santa Ysabel Grant, and Garcia soon established a ranch he named El Fronton de Santa Isabel (Saint Elizabeth's Bluff). Garcia continued to reside at his home in Matamoros, Mexico, and the ranch was operated by hired workers. According to local tradition, the workers on El Fronton De Santa Isabel Ranch began to use this site as a burial ground as early as the 1840s. No grave markers from that time period survive, however, the oldest marked graves in the cemetery date to the 1880s. The ground was consecrated for use as a Catholic Cemetery by French Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in December 1849, although it has served as a community burial ground for people of all faiths throughout its history.

Later owners of the land included members of the Champion (Campeoni) family, who immigrated to America from Italy in the early 19th century. The Champion family donated the cemetery property to the Catholic Church in 1926. It remains an important element of Port Isabel's cultural history.



1930 photo taken by tourist showing paper mache pillows. (Rod & Valerie Bates Collection).



Port Isabel Cemetery c. 1950. Note the markers are mostly cement and stone replacing the earlier wooden ones.

Historically, Dia De Los Muertos was observed by local families, who would visit the grave sites of departed loved ones and decorate them with papel picado, flowers, treats and other relics of importance to the dearly departed. Some would also consider this a symbolic gesture of respect. And the deceased was invited to rejoin the family for a day, Dia de los Muertos.

The cemetery near the old fire hall was the site of an eye witness observation in 1930. A visitor to Port Isabel visited the cemetery on January 9, 1930 and took a photograph. Though the photographer's name is lost to history, the notes penned on the back of the photo offer some rare glimpses into the type of decorations used locally. It reads, "*Jan. 9, 1930. The Mexican cemetery by the sea at Point Isabel. The two pillows in the foreground are of paper. Each grave has had one at first. The flowers are artificial from 10¢ mostly. Some very beautiful natural bushes and lilies there. The graves are strewn with old cheap vases and pitchers of all shapes and stages of depletion. Sea shells cover them all. The crosses for the most part are wooden and bear no name or date. The fences enclose supposedly family plots. No name again. The majority of graves are children's. Grass unkept. Weeds wild. Spanish daggers surround the three sides and gulf on fourth*". With this line the caption ends for lack of space on the back of the photo. This description provides many insights into the old Point Isabel cemetery by the sea rarely before revealed. The visitor probably was perhaps only curious when the photo was taken and the observations were made, but the historic notation is priceless. (Excerpts from History to the Point, Dia De Los Muertos at the Point by Rod E. Bates)