

# **Confederate Naval Works on Goose Creek**

## **In Harris County, Texas**

This Application was presented for an official Texas Historical Marker  
to the Harris County Historical Commission  
on July 15, 2006. Approved.

© By Trevia Wooster Beverly  
With the assistance of  
Garnett Cleveland, Jr. and Bert Marshall

Originally known as the Chubb Shipyard, this site is important not only to Confederate activity in Harris County, but also to the naval and industrial history of the state of Texas.

Location of the subject marker will be in Bayland Park, Hwy. 146, Baytown, Texas.  
It will be on the opposite bank from the original site due to accessibility.

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Garnett Cleveland, Jr. has written the only known work on the Confederate Naval Works at Goose Creek.<sup>1</sup>

Bert Marshall, local historian, is the owner of the website [OurBaytown.com](http://www.OurBaytown.com)

<< <http://www.OurBaytown.com> >>

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<sup>1</sup> "Confederate Naval Works of Goose Creek," *Baytown Vignettes, One Hundred and Fifty Years in the History of a Texas Gulf Coast Community*, edited by John Britt & Muriel Tyssen (Baytown: Lee College, 1992).

## THE CONFEDERATE NAVAL YARD ON GOOSE CREEK

In 1854 the two Chubb brothers, Thomas Henry and John, purchased approximately fifty-six acres out of the old William Scott<sup>2</sup> League on the east bank of Goose Creek<sup>3</sup> at the mouth of Tabbs Bay from Mrs. Mary Jones, wife of Republic of Texas president Anson Jones. It was here they established their shipyard, later to become the Confederate Naval Yard.

The Texas shipping industry was quite modest until the Civil War when the Confederate government encouraged Texans to engage in any kind of manufacturing venture that would contribute to military needs. This encouragement accounts for the increase in the number of industrial establishments and the rise of shipbuilding as an industry and various shipyards began to develop in the northern Galveston Bay area. Out of these yards grew the Goose Creek operation known as the Confederate Naval Works.<sup>4</sup>

Ships constructed in Texas during the Civil War, and those bought, confiscated or obtained through other means, were registered with the Confederate States Navy and came under the command of the Marines. The Marine Department<sup>5</sup> was a division of the Confederates States Army, acting and operating independently of the Confederates States Navy. Thomas Chubb enlisted in the Confederate States Army, Texas Marine Division, and received appointment in September 1861 as Assistant Superintendent of Coastal Defenses of Texas. Captain Thomas Chubb obtained the rank of Commodore. A number of brief references to Thomas Chubb are found in various places, such as in the collection of letters to and from Governor E. M. Pease at Austin History Center in Austin, Texas.<sup>6</sup>

The design and structure of the vessels constructed at Goose Creek and other local shipyards were an integral part of the Texas Navy's effectiveness. Engineers and laborers toiled day and night at these local shipyards to provide a motley fleet of tramp vessels.

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<sup>2</sup> One of Austin's "Old Three-Hundred," the site of his old homestead, Point Pleasant, is THC Marker No. 10774

<sup>3</sup> Goose Creek rises two miles northeast of Highlands in eastern Harris County and runs south-southeast for twelve miles, passing through Baytown before reaching its mouth at Tabbs Bay, two miles northwest of Morgan's Point.

<sup>4</sup> Cleveland's original work, pg. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Not to be confused with the Confederate Marine Corps that was part of the Department of the Navy.

<sup>6</sup> Carroll, H. Bailey. "Texas Collection," pg.581 *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, Vol. LXV, No. 4, April, 1962).

Aside from their shallow draught, centerboard schooners had other advantages that made them suitable for blockade running in Gulf waters. They were generally very weatherly, and were good sailors to windward, but the principal utility of the small craft was in crossing shallow areas where a deep draught vessel could not go.<sup>7</sup>

Records indicate that at least seventeen vessels were constructed in the northern Galveston Bay area for the Confederate States Navy. The only ship consistently to be said to have been built ‘from scratch’ at the Chubb Shipyard was the *Bagdad*, but five others are known to have been refitted at the Confederate Naval Works: *Royal Yacht*, *Henrietta*, *Marguereta*, *Altha Brooks*, and the *Phoebe*. All six of the ships saw service in defense and blockade running for the Confederacy.

The *Royal Yacht*<sup>8</sup> and the *Henrietta* engaged in a battle with Union forces on November 8, 1861 and Thomas Chubb was captured.

After the Civil War, he returned to Galveston and served as Harbor Master until shortly before his death in 1890. The Thomas B. Gaillard<sup>9</sup> (Gillyard) family eventually purchased the land in 1870 where the shipyard was located, and established Gaillard’s Landing. The family homestead was just east of the landing, and later all holdings gave way to the Goose Creek Oil Fields<sup>10</sup>.

Cleveland’s article emphasizes that it is difficult to find a full history of Confederate shipbuilding as records have been destroyed and some seem conflicting and exhaustive research has produced meager results. Since no complete listing of Confederate ships or shipbuilding facilities has been found it seems that delving into less well-known government and military records, such as Confederate procurement records, as well as early histories, newspapers and unpublished manuscripts should be a future project. However, with Cleveland’s work and oral history on the local area level, the evidence seems conclusive that the Goose Creek Naval Yard did exist, and therefore the site deserves a Texas Historical Marker.

Ships known to have had a connection with this shipyard are

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<sup>7</sup> Cleveland’s original work, pg. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center. *Royal Yacht* (Washington DC, 2006, <<< [http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/cfa&royal\\_yacht.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/cfa&royal_yacht.htm)>>>).

<sup>9</sup> Arrived in the area from Natchez, Mississippi about 1867 with his wife and eight children.

<sup>10</sup> The first producing well was brought in by James Isenhour for speculator R.A. Welch in January 1907.

*Bagdad* – the keel was laid in the latter part of 1863 with the schooner being launched in 1864 as a Confederate ship<sup>11</sup> and ran the Union blockade in Galveston to escape. No record of registration found.

*Royal Yacht*<sup>12</sup> – 1855, Maryland. In November 1861 Union naval forces began a series of harassing activities along the Texas coast. The Confederate patrol schooner *CSS Royal Yacht* was captured in the Bolivar Channel by the frigate, *USS Santee* on November 8,<sup>13</sup> and partially burned<sup>14</sup>. It was rebuilt and refitted at Goose Creek from November 1861 until October 1862<sup>15</sup>. It was captured as a blockade-runner in Key West, Florida with 97 bales of “her best cotton” on April 15, 1863. No record of registration found.

*Phoebe* – schooner, built prior to the Civil War, registered Confederate States Navy November 28, 1864. Named for Thomas Chubb’s first wife<sup>16</sup>.

*Henrietta* – sloop, registration in Galveston. The *CSS Henrietta* was involved in a skirmish July 1, 1864. Captured as a blockage-runner with a load of cotton off Tampa, Florida by the *USS Merrimac*.

*Marguereta* – schooner; no record of registration yet found.

*Atha Brooks* – schooner that Alexander Gilmer<sup>17</sup> helped to build and sailed for Galveston and later to Orange<sup>18</sup>, was registered with the Confederate States Navy March 28, 1863.

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<sup>11</sup> Eyewitness account by Dr. O.F. Allen, pg. 43, *The City of Houston From Wilderness To Wonder* (Temple TX: Allen, 1936).

<sup>12</sup> *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*. [http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/cfa8/royal\\_yacht.hem](http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/cfa8/royal_yacht.hem)

<sup>13</sup> Mosocco, Ronald A. with foreword by Dr. Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr. *Chronological Tracking of the American Civil War per the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. Excerpts provided by James River Publications << <http://www.mosocco.com/default.htm> >> Excerpts from *Civil War Chronology* << <http://www.mosocco.com/book.html> >>

<sup>14</sup> Wooster, Ralph A. “Civil War,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. (accessed May 23, 2006).

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<sup>15</sup> Hayes, Galveston, 504-507, “Log of the SCC royal Yacht May 27, 1862-Jan. 1, 1863,” typescript, Rosenberg Library. 53-003 (Logbook 1862-63, Rosenberg Library).

<sup>16</sup> Williams, Henry Howell. 73-0055-73-0341 (mss. 1839-68, Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Gilmer << <http://www.wtblock.com/WtblockJr/gilmer.htm> >> A Guide to the Alexander Gilmer Papers, 1872-1929. University of Texas. << <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/00392/cah-00392.html> >>

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<sup>19</sup> Chambers married Annie Chubb, daughter of Thomas H. Chubb, on November 20, 1851; the couple had two daughters.

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Personal note by Trevia Wooster Beverly, Houston, May 21, 2006.

The ‘old Confederate shipyard’ was on Goose Creek near the mouth of the bay, in the general area of the old Confederate Orphanage<sup>20</sup>, was a fact mentioned many times in the family. My father, Ray Brown Wooster, and his father John Lewis Wooster and uncle, Bert Brown, would talk about it. Uncle Bert’s wife was the former Ora Isenhour, whose father George Isenhour purchased the old orphanage property in January 1897 for \$4,830.00.

I knew the shipyard had existed but unfortunately the site had grown inaccessible and I never visited it.

**Baytown** –Related Texas Historical Markers with connection to the Confederacy. For marker text, see Texas Historical Commission’s website at

<< <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/> >> Click on Atlas, then enter Harris County.

Bayland Orphanage (est. 1866): US 146, north of the old Baytown tunnel site near the new Fred Hartman Bridge (1964). Marker No. 10609.

Bell Prairie, home site of Henry F. Gillette: Bay Oaks Harbor, 2000-1/2 Tri-Cities Beach Road (1989). Marker No. 10613

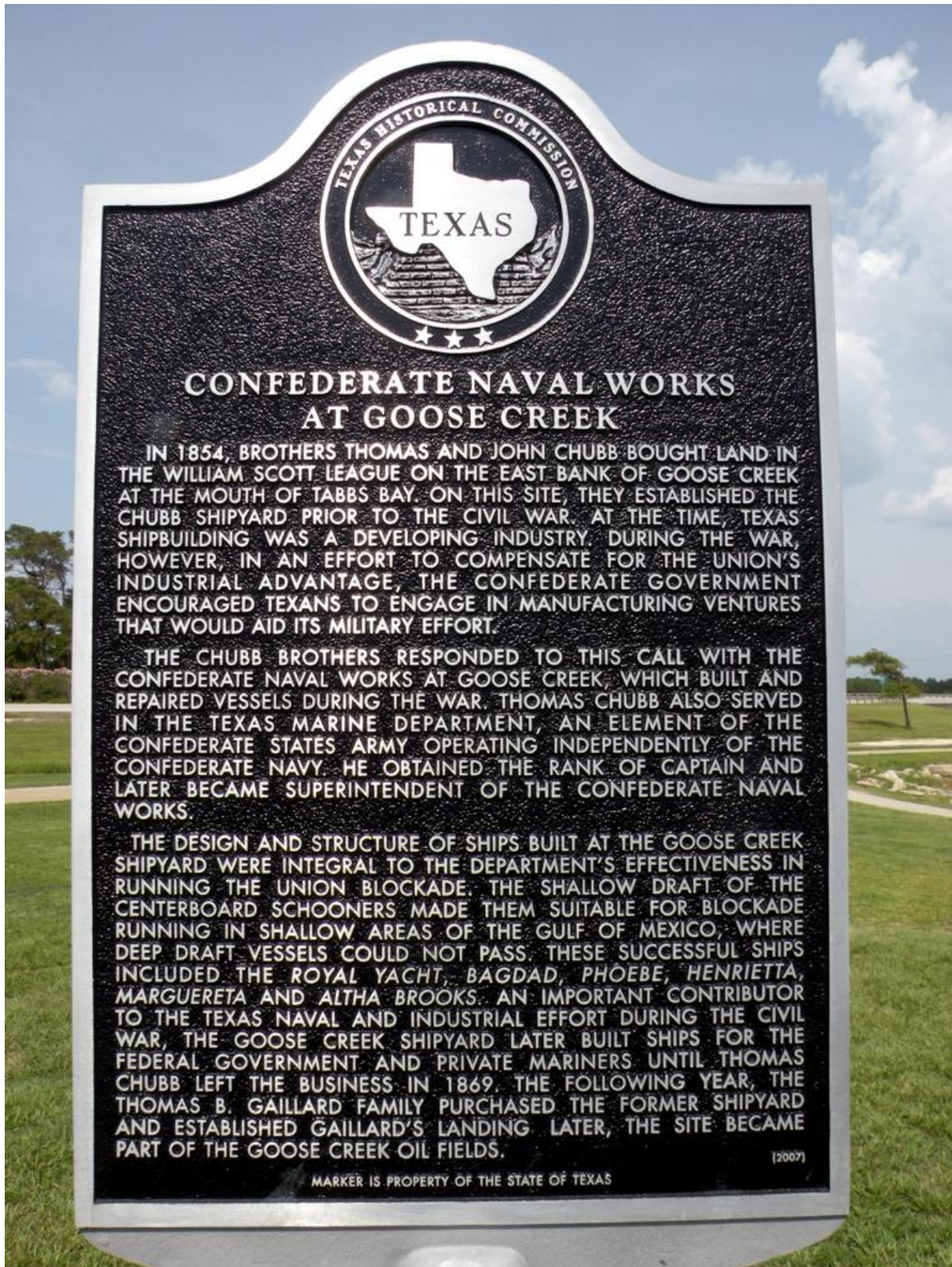
Smith, Ashbel, M.D.: SH 146, 1.8 miles east of old Baytown Tunnel site near the Fred Hartman Bridge (1984). Marker No. 10780

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<sup>20</sup> Founded in 1867 for Confederate Orphans, it later became known as Bayland Orphanage. Texas Historical Marker No. 10609, erected 1964. *Suffer the Children: The History of the Confederate Orphanage At Baylands* by Trevia Wooster Beverly (Houston: Tejas Publications & Research, 2006).





Marker Address:

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