

## *The Brazos River and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway*

In search of fame and fortune, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado sailed up the Brazos River (in Texas) in 1541. He and other adventurers had visions of finding vast treasure troves in south Texas. Those wild visions were not entirely delusional. While Coronado didn't find the "seven cities of gold" he was looking for, black gold was right beneath his feet, patiently waiting to be discovered. Coronado was drawn by some supernatural force to the right place, but at the wrong time.

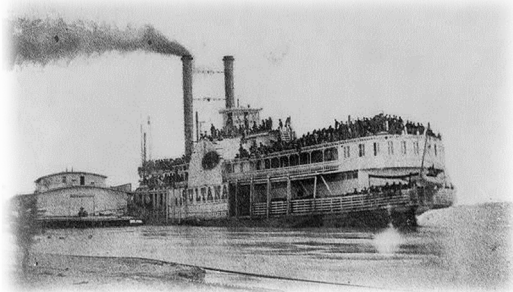
Three hundred years later (1820's) thousands of American and European settlers chose the Brazos River valley (and surrounding regions) as a place to build their towns, farms, and ranches. To accommodate the settlers, paddleboats began transporting passengers and freight up and down the Brazos, starting in 1842.

The Brazos flows into the Gulf of Mexico roughly 25 miles south of Galveston, which was already a well-established port at that time. The challenge was to find the most efficient way to link the Brazos River transportation activity to the Port of Galveston. Moving people and freight by land was difficult given the lack of good roads. Railroad lines wouldn't be available until well into the 1870's. Sailing out into the open waters of the Gulf, and reaching Galveston that way was a frequently used option, but rough seas sometimes made that a risky proposition.



In the early 1850's local businessmen embarked on a project that at that time must have seemed like a ridiculously huge undertaking. They began to build an inland canal, connecting the Brazos River to West Galveston Bay. I can just imagine the conversation they might have had at the time.

"Well gentlemen, this will be the largest construction project ever attempted in this part of the country. We can stand here and swat mosquitos, or we can start digging."



By 1854 the canal was completed, providing a calm, protected waterway and a reliable mode of transportation from the mouth of the Brazos River to the Port of Galveston. This was their life-line, and their connection to the outside world.

The canal system proved to be so effective they continued to lengthen it, eventually connecting all the major rivers and ports along the entire length of the Texas coast. This mind boggling construction project continued on until 1949 (almost 100 years).

One barge moving freight on the canal can hold a volume of cargo that would have required 60 trucks to move. It is a very fuel efficient way to move freight.

The Texas inland canal system is now part of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, stretching 1,300 miles from Brownsville Texas to St. Marks Florida. The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway continues to be a vital shipping lane to this day. And it all started 160 years ago on the Brazos River.



Length of Major Rivers In Texas: Miles

1. Rio Grande	1,900
2. Red	1,290
<b>3. Brazos</b>	<b>1,280</b>
4. Pecos	926
6. Colorado	865