

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Hal Jackson

When Hurricane Ike made landfall early on the morning of September 13, 2008, it was a Category 3 storm with extremely high winds that reached well over 100 miles per hour. The monster hurricane aimed its fury right at the Texas Gulf Coast. Galveston, which took a direct hit from Ike, is home to many historic structures, some of which had survived the infamous 1900 hurricane that hit the city and caused the deaths of more than 6,000 people.

Fortunately today, because of the advances in storm tracking, the folks along the state's Gulf Coast were ready for Ike. Nonetheless, the storm dealt a catastrophic blow. Ike was blamed for dozens of deaths, and damage in U.S. coastal areas was estimated at \$27 billion. News sources reported that tide and surges ranged from 10 to 13 feet along Galveston Island. The results were devastating.

Homes and businesses were reduced to sticks and bricks, and some in the area lost power for weeks. It was a difficult time for everyone, including the staff and volunteers of the Galveston Historical Foundation, a non-profit group that owns and manages seven of the city's historic structures. One of the first buildings that GHF personnel inspected after the storm passed was its own headquarters, the **1861 Custom House**, where they discovered that nearly eight feet of water had caused damage to files, offices, archives, equipment systems, and inventory.

Though not a historic home, the **1877 Tall Ship *Elissa***, which was restored by GHF in 1982, rode out the storm at Pier 22 with little damage beyond the loss of several sails. The maintenance shop that



services the *Elissa* was not so lucky and sustained major losses from flooding.

The historic **1859 Ashton Villa** took a big hit, too. The home is in grave danger of damage from mildew and mold. GHF has determined that the antique furniture and artworks, much of it original to the house, might be able to be saved. The ornate first floor of the house, with its elaborate "Gold Room," parlor and dining room, was flooded with 30 inches of water and mud, soaking the furniture and art.

The **1886-1892 Gresham House** at 14th and Broadway, also known as the Bishop's Palace, and the most visited historic property on the Island, suffered damage when its third-story windows blew out.

The wooden **1859 St. Joseph's Church**, the state's oldest German Catholic church, lost some windows and shutters were also damaged. The wooden steeple that was somewhat

truncated in the 1900 storm is still standing.

The **1921 National Bank** building, home of the Galveston County Historical Museum, suffered some water damage in the basement; however, exhibits appear to be fine.

The two oldest residences on the island, the **1838 Menard Home** and the **1839 Samuel May Williams Home** escaped unscathed as did the **1880 Garten Verein**.

As if those losses were not bad enough for the historical community, Ike did not simply single out Galveston. There are many other museums and archives along the Texas Gulf Coast that also suffered great loss from the storm. Here's just a sampling of the damage to historic structures that Hurricane Ike wreaked:

**McFaddin-Ward Historical House, Beaumont:** The McFaddin-Ward House suffered significant tree damage, but there were no problems at the house. Extraordinary efforts are being made to save the toppled tree (see more on this story on pages 28-29 of this magazine). This storm damage is in stark contrast to that sustained during Hurricane Rita, when the Carriage House on the property suffered severe damage that took two years to repair. This is according to MWHH Communications Coordinator Donda Foran Thomasson.

**John Jay French Museum, Beaumont:** There was no loss at the 1845 pioneer home of John Jay French, reported Darlene Chodzinski of the Beaumont Heritage Society. There was, however, damage to some of the outbuildings and to the grounds, with many trees and much of the fencing around the property lost. The

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museum is currently closed while the clean-up continues. **The Chambers House**, also operated by the Beaumont Heritage Society, was not as lucky. High winds loosened siding, destroyed many window screens, and lifted floor boards on the exterior front porch causing severe water damage. Although two windows were broken, the structure's interior and the collection were mostly spared. The exterior damage will require extensive repairs, and the museum is closed until those can be made.

**The W.H. Stark House, Orange:** The Stark House's underground basement, rare in Orange, had several feet of water that caused very minor damage to the house. The lower floor of the adjoining Carriage House took on two to three feet of water that caused extensive damage with minor loss to some collections.

**Heritage House and Heritage History Museum, Orange:** There are two struc-

tures at this property. The 106-year-old home withstood the storm fairly well, though the air conditioning, duct work, and insulation must be replaced at a cost of \$60,000. The museum, on the other hand, was totally lost, according to Joyce Atkins, president of the board. Showcases, archival letters, antique clothing, and displays were all lost under three feet of water. Some of the World War II artifacts, including several swords, were saved, and those are being restored by a local man who has donated his services. The organization's computers, files, and other equipment were all lost.

**Battleship TEXAS and San Jacinto Monument, Houston area:** A good portion of the San Jacinto State Historic Site is devastated. The monument, battleship, and their collections are fine. The gift shop, however, is a total loss.

**Bayou Bend, Houston:** There were at least a dozen large trees down. The drive and gardens were littered with

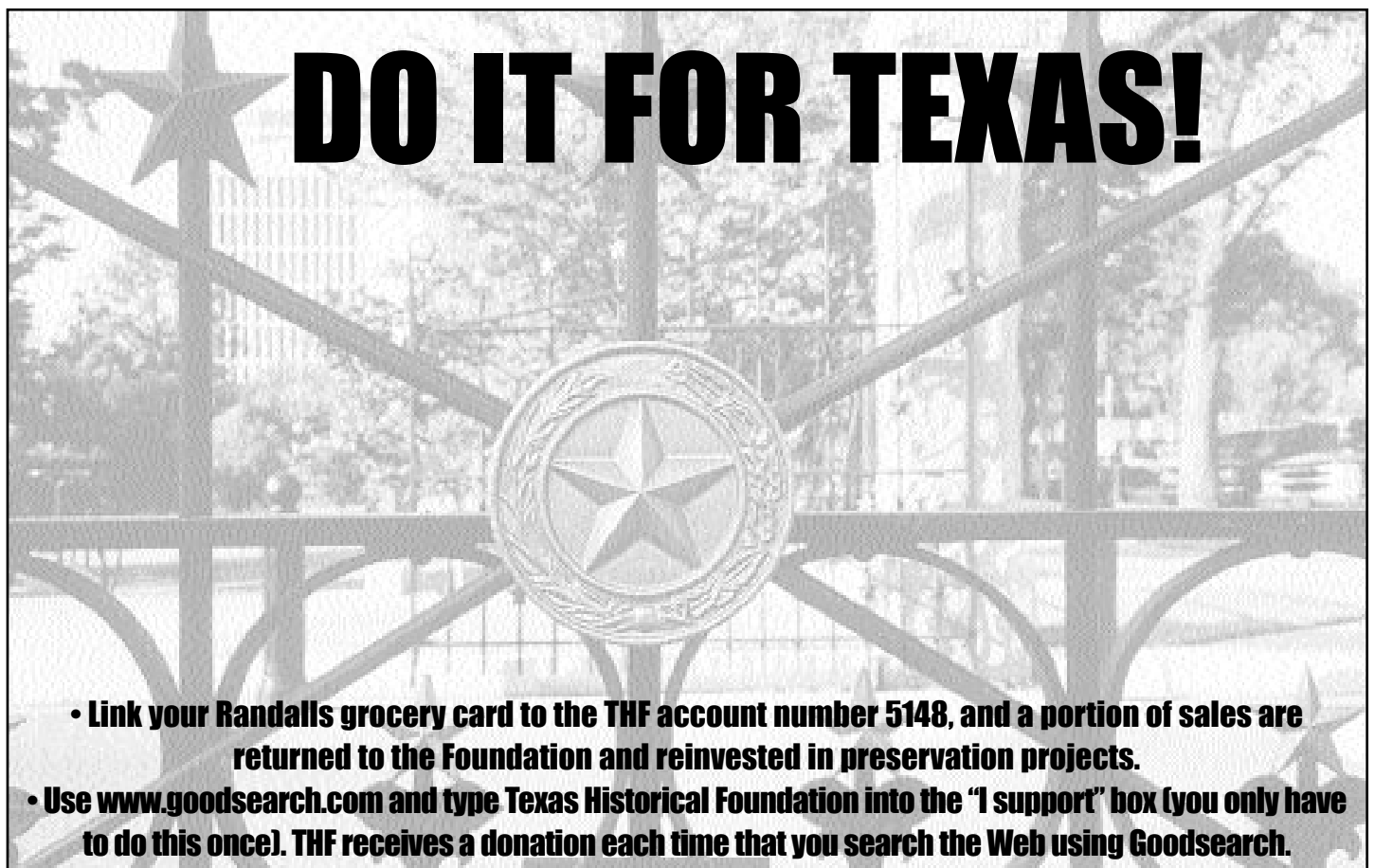
debris, but the house escaped damage.

**Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty:** The library and research center lost 64 trees. The buildings received minor damage.

**Millard's Crossing Historic Village, Nacogdoches:** The historic village suffered some tree damage. A few of the windows of an 1837 house on the property blew out.

Thanks to good disaster preparation plans, dedicated staff and volunteers, intestinal fortitude, and good old Texas resolve to handle whatever comes one's way, most of these historic structures will be repaired to stand tall once again. In the meantime, do every one of them a favor by sending your donations or at least stopping by to show your support. They can use the help.

*Send your comments about this column to Hal Jackson, Texas Historical Foundation, P.O. Box 50314, Austin, TX 78763.*



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