

# SABINE PASS BEACON

**NEWSLETTER  
OF THE  
FRIENDS OF  
SABINE PASS  
BATTLEGROUND**



## MAKE PLANS NOW TO VISIT SABINE PASS BATTLEGROUND!

This year the Dick Dowling Day event will be a one-day event on Saturday, September 8, 2012. Because of the way the calendar coincides with a weekend, we are lucky this year to be able to commemorate the 149th anniversary of the battle on the actual date of the anniversary. Please make plans now to bring your family and come visit the reenactment and other events. In this issue we print a complete schedule of events.

Also in this issue we focus on some of the ships associated with the Battle of Sabine Pass and participants in the battle. One very large artifact associated with the USS *Clifton*, the "Walking Beam," will soon be returning to the Battleground where it will become an important part of the historical narrative associated with the battle.

One of the things that makes the Sabine Pass Battleground so interesting is that it is one of the very few battlefields where troops in a shore fortification engaged a fleet of warships. "Ship vs Shore" battlefields are relatively rare and even rarer still are battlefields where the "Shore" side of the battle emerged victorious. Now, with the addition of the *Clifton*'s walking beam, the Sabine Pass Bat-

tleground will be one of the few historic fort sites in the world to include part of the ships that attacked there.

**If you have not already done so, please take a moment to renew your membership in the Friends organization for 2012. The cost is only \$25. The application form is in this issue.**

See you at the Battleground!

*Ed Cotham*

Editor



**Richard W. Dowling Monument**

*Sabine Pass Battleground*

# **DICK DOWLING DAY 2012**

*In Commemoration of*

**149<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF SABINE PASS**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2012**

**FREE ADMISSION!**

Living History Demonstrations Through-out the Day!  
**Authentic, Firing Civil War Artillery!**

**Food & Vendors!**

**Dramatic Historical Events Re-enacted for Your Education and Entertainment!**

**9:00 AM until 5:00 PM**

**Gates Open to the Public**

**10:00 AM**

Court-martial and Execution of Lt. Elijah P. Allen

**10:30 AM**

Battle Reenactment

**11:30 AM**

Memorial Service (hosted by the Jefferson County Historical Commission)

**1:00 to 2:00 PM**

Walking Tour of the Sabine Pass Battleground State Historic Site.

Guided by Edward Cotham.

Author of *Sabine Pass: The Confederacy's Thermopylae*

**2:30 PM**

U.S. Raiding Party v. Mrs. Kate Dorman

**3:00 PM**

Battle Reenactment

# Texas History Organizations Help with the Walking Beam Project!

The Texas Historical Commission has asked the Friends of Sabine Pass Battleground to help with raising the funds required to move the Walking Beam of *USS Clifton* (above right) back to the Battleground and install it in a permanent location that will include signs explaining its operation and historical significance. We are happy to help with a project that we regard as one of the most important things that can be done to improve the Sabine Pass Battleground visitor experience.

Together with the Austin Civil War Round Table and the Houston Civil War Round Table we have recently managed to raise a total of \$7,000 to contribute to the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission toward this project. Other historic heritage groups are considering additional donations for this project and we will be pleased to announce their names as soon as the amounts are approved and donated.

Raising money for this type of enhancement to the Battleground is the purpose for which this Friends Group was formed and we are proud to help the Texas Historical Commission in this historic project.

## Historic Gun Connected with Sabine Pass Battle Commander Located in New York

On a recent trip to Oyster Bay, New York, Ed Cotham's friend Will Leven took a picture of the gun pictured on the right and sent it to Ed because of his interest in Civil War history. The gun had been formally presented to the town by Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. As it turns out, the gun has a sign identifying it as the 30 pounder (4.2 inch) Parrott rifle from the RR *Cuyler*.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Frederick Crocker joined the US Navy. Along with Crocker, the Navy also chartered a cargo ship that Crocker owned part of (RR *Cuyler*) and converted her into a gunboat.

Crocker would not command the RR *Cuyler* very long. In the



The USS *Clifton*'s Walking Beam in Beaumont's Riverside Park circa 2008



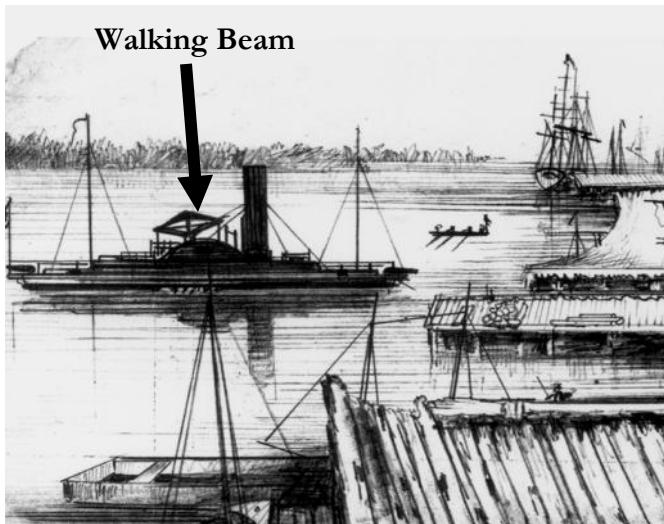
fall of 1862, when Crocker first led Federal forces in the capture of Sabine Pass, Crocker was in command of *USS Kensington*. By the fall of 1863, when Crocker led the Federal attack once again at Sabine Pass, Crocker was in command of *USS Clifton*.

The *Cuyler* saw active service in the war., capturing and destroying a large number of Confederate merchant vessels and blockade runners. Following the end of the Civil War, R. R. *Cuyler* returned to New York where she was decommissioned on 1 July 1865 and sold at auction on 15 August to Russel Sturgis of New York. In December 1866, she was purchased by the Republic of Colombia and, after arrival at Cartagena, renamed *El Rayo*. She remained in Cartagena Harbor, the subject of a diplomatic dispute following a change of government, from February to September 1867. In mid-September, she was blown from her moorings during a storm and grounded on a coral reef where she was abandoned.

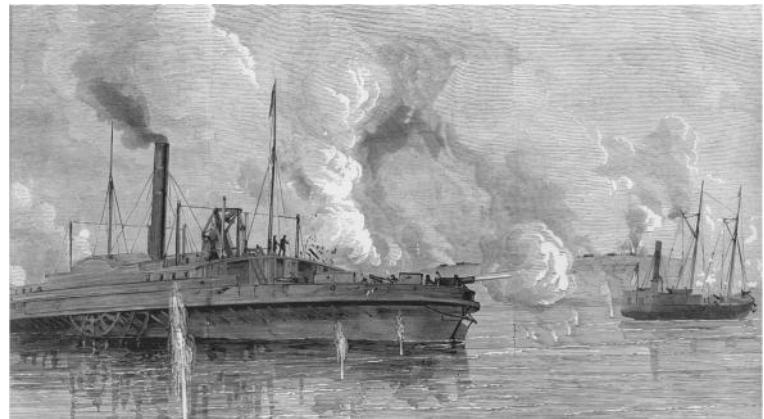
# Coming soon to the Sabine Pass Battleground!

## The “Walking Beam” of USS *Clifton*

The most prominent US Navy warship at the Battle of Sabine Pass was Captain Frederick Crocker's flagship, USS *Clifton*. When Lt. Dick Dowling's company of Confederate artillerymen was able to disable the *Clifton*, it was the key event in the battle and led to the failure of the Federal attempt to invade Texas through Sabine Pass. In every depiction of USS *Clifton*, the most prominent feature of the ship is the diamond-shaped “walking beam” near the top of the vessel. The walking beam rocked up and down on the ship, much the same way the pump-jack on an oil well does, turning the straight up and down motion of a piston in the steam engine into the circular motion necessary to move the paddlewheels on either side of the ship.



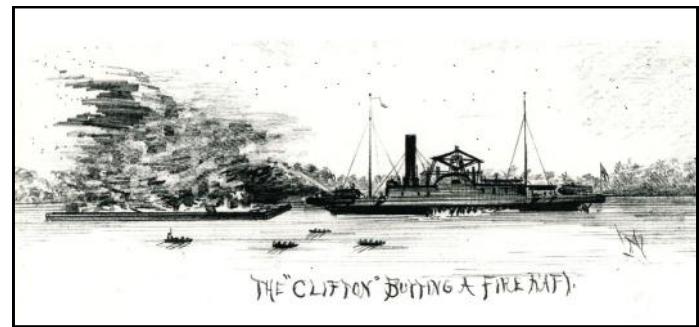
“Appearance of the Levee at New Orleans, USS *Clifton* at Left Center” Sketch by Dr. Daniel D. T. Nestell, courtesy of the Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.



The Disabling and Capture of the Federal Gunboats *Sachem* (Right) and *Clifton* (Left) in the Attack on Sabine Pass, Texas, September 8, 1863. From *The Soldier in Our Civil War* (1885)

If you would like to see a model of a walking beam in operation at the U.S. Naval Academy, go to the following website (or type in “Walking Beam Steam Engine Running” on Youtube):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUDQYzE9gcM>



“The *Clifton* Butting a Fire Raft,” Sketch by Dr. Daniel D. T. Nestell, courtesy of the Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.

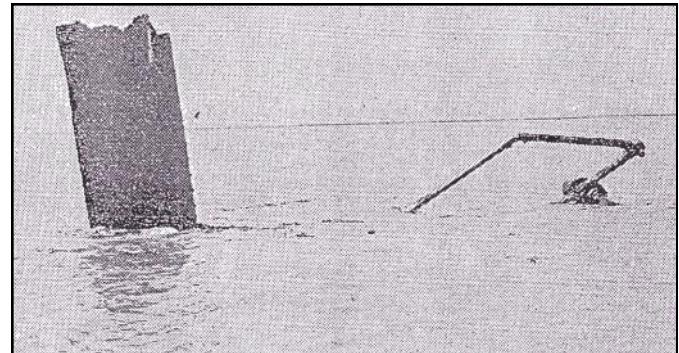
# Recovery of the Walking Beam from the wreck of USS *Clifton* in 1911

The following article appeared in the *Beaumont Journal* of October 2, 1911, under the title: "Walking Beam of *Clifton* is Raised: To be Brought to Beaumont Tonight:"

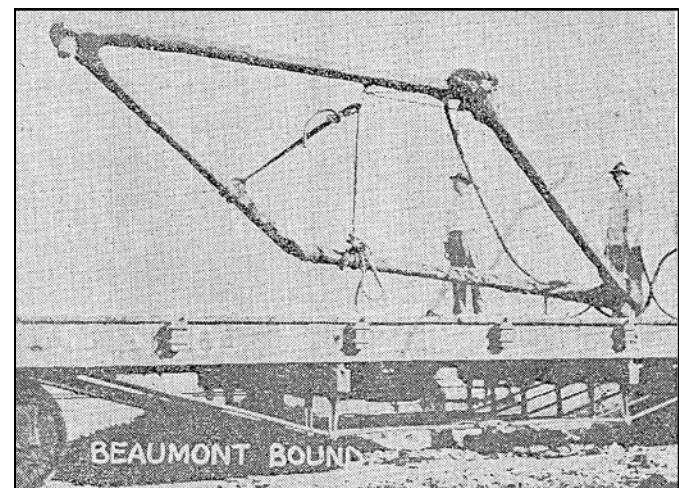
The walking beam of the federal war vessel *Clifton* has been raised from the waters of Sabine Pass, towed to Sabine and loaded on a car, and will this afternoon or tonight be brought into Beaumont via the T. & N.O. [railroad]. The portion of the *Clifton* raised Sunday measured 9x18 feet, and weighs 5,000 pounds, being somewhat in diamond shape. It is proposed to erect it in Keith park, and the selection of the exact site will probably be made this afternoon or tonight, Capt. Rogers of the local U.C.V. camp and a committee having been instructed to interview Mayor Fletcher and members of the city council in regard to the question of placing the portion of the *Clifton* in the city's principal park.

R.A. Nichols, manager of the Texas Dredging Company, Captain H.M. Fredrickson, Robert Wood, J.F. McCall, H.M. Bradley, and Frank Godsey, accompanied by a crew of fifteen men, made the trip to Sabine Pass yesterday aboard the tug *Viva* of the Texas Dredging Company. They worked hard all day in raising the walking beam of the sunken vessel, which has been lying in the waters off Sabine Pass since September [8], 1863, when it was destroyed by the Confederate forces under Captain Dick Dowling in the memorable battle of Sabine Pass, with which the people of Texas are all more or less familiar.

The Beaumont gentlemen and the crew of fifteen men worked strenuously throughout the day Sunday in tearing the walking beam from the vessel and they succeeded in securing it intact. The beam was placed aboard a boat and towed to Sabine, and placed aboard a boat and towed to Sabine, and placed on a T. & N.O. car for transportation to Beaumont. It will probably be brought up from the lower Jefferson county town late this afternoon or tonight.



The Walking Beam in place  
on the wreck of USS *Clifton*



The Walking Beam  
after removal from the wreck

## Clifton's Walking Beam in Conservation

One of the first projects undertaken by the Friends of Sabine Pass Battleground was to determine whether the City of Beaumont would permit movement of the *Clifton*'s walking beam from its display place in a city park to the Sabine Pass Battleground. Bill Quick, the first president and founder of the Friends organization, was instrumental in securing the city's permission to move the walking beam to a more historically appropriate location.

When the Texas Historical Commission assumed responsibility for the Sabine Pass Battleground, they saw immediately the value of having a piece of the *Clifton* in the park and began planning to secure and move the walking beam. But the walking beam had seen heavy use in a salt water marine environment during and after the Civil War, followed by uncovered exposure for almost 90 years in the Beaumont Park. The question was raised whether some form of professional conservation was possible prior to movement of the walking beam to Sabine Pass.

Fortunately, one of the greatest marine conservation facilities in the world is here in Texas. The Conservation Research Laboratory (CRL), directed by Dr. Donny L. Hamilton, is one of the oldest continuously operated conservation laboratories that deals primarily with archaeological

material from shipwrecks and other underwater sites. Operating under the Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation, CRL plays an important role in the Nautical Archaeology Program at Texas A&M University (TAMU), and works closely with all of the excavation projects of the TAMU-affiliated Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

The Texas Historical Commission arranged for the walking beam to be shipped to the CRL for conservation and we recently had a chance to drop in and see what was happening with it. Jim Jobling, Laboratory Manager for the CRL, took us for a tour of the CRL facility that houses the *Clifton* Walking Beam. The beam is presently in a chemical bath that makes use of an electrical current to draw the salt out of the iron. As you can imagine, a vat that fits the dimensions of the walking beam is not something that is readily available. But Jim and the CRL team were up to the challenge, having one specially made to fit the diamond-shaped beam. Jim's hope is that the beam will have completed its treatment late this summer or early this fall and it is our hope that the beam can then be transported to the Battleground in time to be on display prior to the 150th anniversary of the battle in 2013.

The walking beam is the largest remaining artifact from the battle of Sabine Pass and we are delighted to see that it is being cared for so well. We are eager to see the beam returned to the Battleground and placed in its final home.



Jim Jobling, Lab Manager at the Conservation Research Laboratory, at Texas A&M University, stands behind the specially designed conservation tank containing the Walking Beam of USS *Clifton*

**JOIN FSPB  
AND TELL YOUR FRIENDS**

**FRIENDS OF  
SABINE PASS BATTLEGROUND  
MEMBERSHIP - 2012**

Please enroll me as a member of the **FRIENDS OF SABINE PASS BATTLEGROUND** for the current calendar year.

Enclosed is \$25 for an individual membership for the calendar year. Check or money order should be made payable to FRIENDS OF SABINE PASS BATTLEGROUND and mailed to the address below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. No. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Related to a battle participant? \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIL TO:**

FRIENDS OF SABINE PASS BATTLEGROUND  
8031 Chimney Rock Court  
Port Arthur, TX 77642



Richard W. Dowling Monument

*Sabine Pass Battleground*

Membership is good for one year (January – December)

FSPB is a tax exempt organization under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code

Sabine Pass Battleground State Historic Site, located in Jefferson County, opened in 1974. Friends of Sabine Pass Battleground was formed in November 2008 by members of many historic preservation and heritage groups who came together to create an organization dedicated to preserving and interpreting the Sabine Pass Battleground and the historic sites in the area that are an important part of its story. The members of FSPB include descendants of Confederate and Union Veterans, as well as members of the general public who are interested in military history. The IRS has approved FSPB as a tax exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Sabine Pass Battleground is located 1.5 miles south of Sabine Pass on Dick Dowling Rd., 15 miles south of Port Arthur via State Highway 87.

# SABINE PASS BEACON

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Friends of Sabine Pass Battleground  
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Houston, Texas  
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