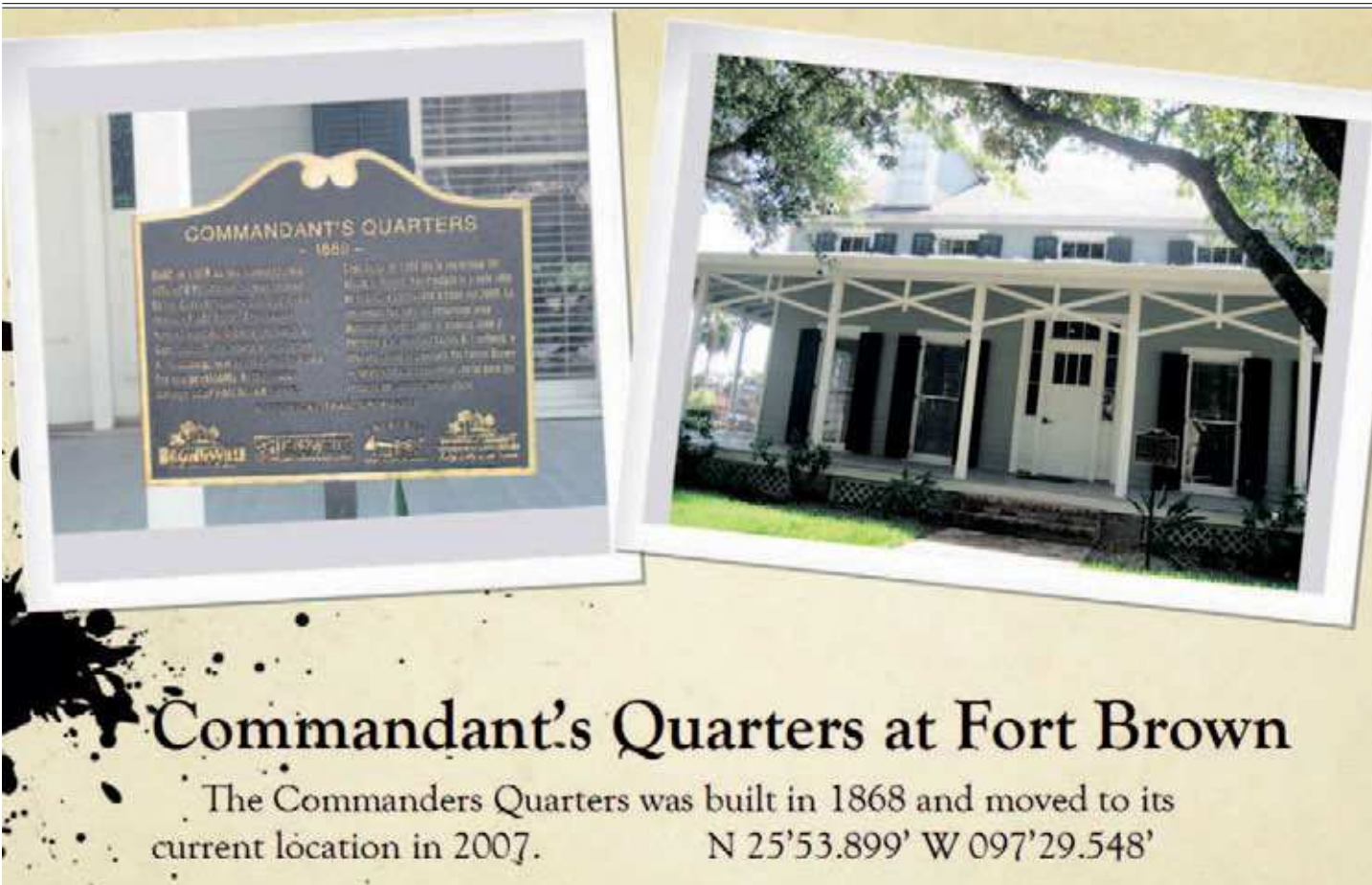


# SUNDAY FOCUS

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 2014

9B



## Commandant's Quarters at Fort Brown

The Commanders Quarters was built in 1868 and moved to its current location in 2007.  
N 25°53.899' W 097°29.548'

Courtesy photos

**COMMENTARY | Alyssa Burgin and Bob Cash**

## Trans-Pacific Partnership threatens U.S. jobs, economy

Finally, an idea that both the right and the left should wholeheartedly oppose — the newest international trade agreement known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which Congress can put on “fast track” status with a vote expected in the next weeks. Often described as “NAFTA on steroids,” this slick package deal has elements that would send millions more American jobs overseas, usurp U.S. sovereignty and obliterate environmental laws, labor protections and food safety laws. It has something for everyone to fear.

Congress will vote on it, but our representatives had no part in its making. It was largely written behind the closed doors of trans-national corporations, its details hidden away, not just from the public and the press, but from our representatives. Only a few lawmakers in Congress have seen it and under a threat of legal action have been forbidden to share what they saw with the American people. Meanwhile, 600 U.S. corporate advisers were given free access to the text as it was being negotiated.

Corporations are hoping to “fast track” this bill through Congress, which was introduced on Jan. 9. Fast-tracking a piece of legislation means that Congress is obliged to vote yea or nay on that legislation without amendment or debate within 90 days of its introduction. But due to the secrecy around the TPP and the practical constraints on digesting such a massive bill within 90 days or less, most congressional representatives might find themselves forced to vote on the TPP largely without knowing what's really in it.

All trade agreements like NAFTA have started with bright promises of more jobs and more exports, but now we have a 20-year experience with NAFTA that paints a very different picture. President Bill Clinton said NAFTA would create 180,000 U.S. jobs annually and lead to a huge increase in U.S. exports. The reality of NAFTA, however, is that there have been more than 1 million jobs lost.

Now the Obama administration is pushing for passage of TPP, which is much larger than NAFTA and has more implications for U.S. jobs. This comes as many Americans are still struggling with unemployment, lower wages and the loss of pensions. Job losses from all free trade agreements and to China after it entered the World Trade Organization is, by a conservative estimate, more than 3.7 million, including 250,000 jobs lost in Texas. What is to be our future if this continues?

Another huge issue that should anger every American — regardless of party affiliation — is that if TPP is approved disputes would be handled by an international court, thereby removing any shred of American sovereignty. The investor state provision, also contained in NAFTA and most trade agreements, means that all our laws, regulations and court decisions can be overturned in international tribunals — not U.S. courts, if a foreign corporation challenges them as a barrier to free trade. Judges in international tribunals are often corporate lawyers from the same corporations that wrote much of NAFTA and the TPP.

Another concern with the TPP is that it severely weakens our food safety standards. Many TPP countries have much weaker standards and in the TPP there is an obligation that guarantees “equivalence,” stating that no party to it can require that imported food meet their domestic standards. In regards to medicines it would help extend patents for many years, thus denying those under TPP rule access to affordable generic medicines.

A majority of Americans think the United States should either renegotiate NAFTA or get out. Only 15 percent polled support our staying in NAFTA. We have learned a lesson from NAFTA that should be applied to the TPP. It's time for the TPP, forged in darkness, to be examined in the light of NAFTA's reality. As congressional action looms, it's time for members to be held accountable and asked to protect American jobs and our democracy from growing corporate power.

*Alyssa Burgin is executive director of the Texas Drought Project. Bob Cash is executive director of the Texas Fair Trade Coalition.*

**COMMENTARY | Dr. Christopher Miller and Dr. Russell Skowronek**

## Creation of a virtual Civil War trail in RGV

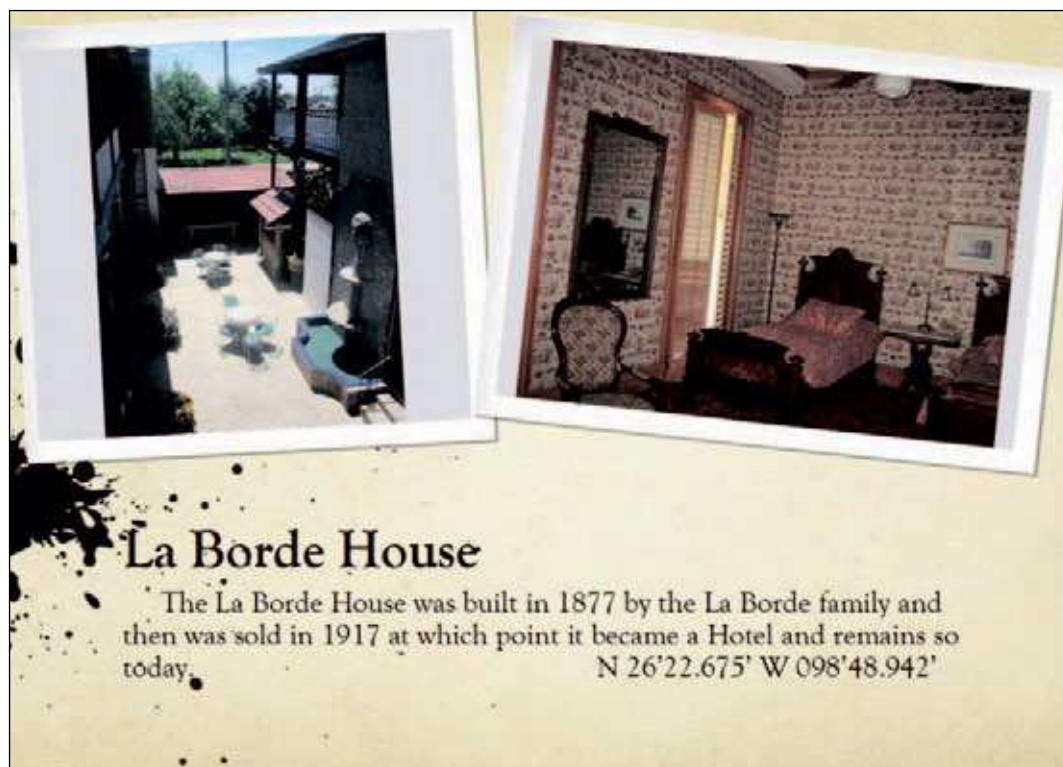
The Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools program (CHAPS) at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) is

laying the groundwork for the development of a virtual Rio Grande Valley Civil War Trail consisting of a trail map, podcasts and a website. The proposed trail would highlight the region's role in the American Civil War, leading visitors from the beaches

of Brazos Santiago — where Union troops waded ashore — through forts, battlefields and skirmish sites in Starr, Zapata and Webb counties and culminate at Laredo's Fort McIntosh.

These are all sites where our Valley forebears struggled — sometimes brother against brother — in a monumental war that is an important part of our region's 250-year-old Euro-American history. This history has witnessed political changes from Spanish to Mexican to Confederate and ultimately United States rule. While a number of these sites are commemorated in federal, state, county and local parks and museums, a virtual Civil War Trail can relate themes and lead visitors through a coherent path.

Generous support from the Summerlee Foundation is helping CHAPS to develop the trail but matching funds are needed from local residents, visitors, businesses and civic organizations for it to become a reality in time for a commemoration of national importance taking place in the Valley next year. The last land battle of the Civil War, known as the Battle of Palmito Ranch, was fought just outside of Brownsville on May 12-13, 1865. A re-enactment of the battle to be held on its 150th anniversary in May 2015 will be the culmination of sesquicentennial



### La Borde House

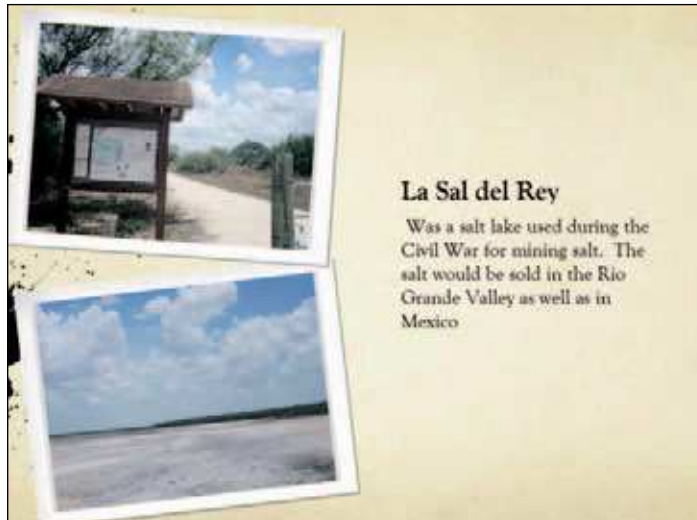
The La Borde House was built in 1877 by the La Borde family and then was sold in 1917 at which point it became a Hotel and remains so today.  
N 26°22.675' W 098°48.942'

observations of the American Civil War and will draw people from across the United States to our region.

Having an operational Rio Grande Valley Civil War trail by May 2015 will help drive the continued development of heritage tourism to our region, which includes eco-tourism. Many visitors come to the Valley to enjoy the sights of our birds, butterflies and beaches, and they also take the time to visit cultural sites associated with the history of our region. All of this activity ultimately supports local businesses and increases visits to our parks, historic sites and museums.

However, the importance of a Rio Grande Valley Civil War trail exceeds its potential economic impact. The trail would also stand as a permanent legacy to those Valley forebears who fought and died here. Remembering and understanding their role in our history will also help to educate and inform new generations of Valley residents about this important aspect of local history that ties our region to the historical experience of the rest of the nation.

The Rio Grande Valley Civil War Trail enjoys the support of the National Park Service, Texas Tropical Trail Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the



### La Sal del Rey

Was a salt lake used during the Civil War for mining salt. The salt would be sold in the Rio Grande Valley as well as in Mexico



### The Porfirio Diaz House

Home to the Brownsville Historical Association as well as the Brownsville Heritage Museum  
N 25°54.042' W 097°29.778'

Museum of South Texas History and other agencies and organizations. We invite readers to join in the effort to create the Civil War Trail by visiting <https://bronccountry.utpa.edu/chaps>. To learn more about

CHAPS, visit [www.utpa.edu/chaps](http://www.utpa.edu/chaps) or call (956) 665-3231.

*Dr. Christopher Miller is associate professor of history at UTPA. Dr. Russell Skowronek is a UTPA professor of history and CHAPS program director.*