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RICE UNIVERSITY

WORKING THE WATERFRONT ON FILM: COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND
COMMUNITY STUDIES

by

PATRICIA BELLIS BIXEL

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Working the Waterfront on Film: Commercial Photography and Community Studies

by

Patricia Bellis Bixel

Historians of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries deprive themselves of rich resources by limiting their research to textual materials. Since the invention of photography in 1839, an immense body of images has been produced, and many of these pictures rest in commercial photography archives—businesses that over the years recorded major and minor events, important individuals, working class laborers, weddings, funerals, and even the geography of cities, towns and countrysides. The visual record comprised by these archives offers a new way to recover people's history and to understand better the evolution of occupational, ethnic, political, or cultural communities.

This work uses the photographic archive of the Verkin Studio of Galveston, Texas, and selected images from the Achille Simon collection of New Orleans, Louisiana, to recover and reconstruct the maritime community of Galveston, Texas, during the approximate period 1900 to 1940. Employing the images to investigate four particular areas—the Galveston Wharf Company, the waterfront's workers, the ships calling in the port, and the Galveston grade raising effort—this monograph treats the images as both information and material culture, gathering from them specifics about ships, people, companies, and activities as well as examining their circumstances of production and usage—who took them? Why? Which ones were used and how were they used? A final chapter details the creation of an exhibition using these images and explains the design and production choices made to convey the multiplicity of interpretations suggested by the materials.
Studied through this two-fold method, commercial photography archives may yield especially rich interpretive material and also offer insights into areas of art history and the history of photography as well. This particular effort draws from existing work in the history of photography, social history, community studies, Texas history, and maritime studies and contributes—as an applicable case study—to all of those fields.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When a project takes as long to finish as this one, innumerable debts are incurred. I became aware of the Verkin collection through my work with the 1877 Iron Barque Elissa in Galveston, Texas, and everyone connected with the Texas Seaport Museum and its parent organization, the Galveston Historical Foundation, has been supportive of all phases of this work. Scholars investigating any aspect of Galveston, Texas, depend heavily on the goodwill of the Galveston and Texas History Center based at Rosenberg Library in Galveston; and Casey Edward Greene, Anna B. Peebler, Shelly Henley Kelly, and Julia Dunn made what seemed to be an interminable series of Saturday research days bearable and pleasant.

A James Duncan Phillips research fellowship at Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, made it possible to survey the complete Verkin archive in June 1994. Mark Sexton, Kathy Flynn, Jane Ward, and Will La Moy provided every assistance possible. Likewise the staff of the Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin was very helpful when I viewed their Verkin holdings. Both institutions produced beautiful prints of the Verkins’ work for exhibition purposes as well.

Texas Committee for the Humanities, Galveston Historical Foundation, Rice University, Rice Media Center, and Louisiana State Museum supported the exhibition of these images, and through their financial and administrative efforts brought this material to a much wider audience, and for that, I will always be grateful.

Graduate study is nearly always fraught with stress—financial and intellectual—and I have been very fortunate to pursue that endeavor at Rice University. Financial support from the department facilitated classwork years and research trips. Departmental administrators Nancy Parker and Paula Platt eased me through the bureaucratic maze and
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Introduction

Historians of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries deprived themselves of rich resources by limiting their research to textual materials. Since the invention of photography in 1839, an immense body of images has been produced, and many of these pictures rest in commercial photography archives—businesses that, over the years, recorded major and minor events, important individuals, working-class laborers, weddings, funerals, and even the geography of cities, towns, and countrysides. The visual record comprised by these archives offers a new way to recover people’s history and to understand better the evolution of occupational, ethnic, political, or cultural communities. Using photographs as a kind of historical source material requires that a historian address images in an innovative way, however, developing an interpretive framework unlike that of an art historian, cultural historian, or artist. Insights resulting from close, detailed analysis of visual materials can more fully illuminate a subject; add subtlety, shading, and detail; and enrich our recovery and reconstruction of the past.

Photography, above all, is a process. In its most basic and simple form, an individual practitioner, by mechanical means, uses light and chemicals to create an image. In their earliest manifestations, photographs were understood and applauded as representations of reality, exact renderings of things in the physical world. And the invention of this seemingly magical process—a way to obtain and fix permanently a perfect, two-dimensional picture of a building, landscape, person, or object—led to a visual revolution. Artifacts of this revolution—billions and billions of photographs—are both cause and effect of the upheaval. Photographs, produced by untold millions of people, changed the way we see, the way we remember, the way we behave, and the way we understand the world. Images are active agents within our culture that inform, enrage, incite, and resolve. This dissertation examines how a particular set of photographs—selections that picture the island city of Galveston, Texas, from the Verkin Collection and
portraits from the Achille Simon Collection from New Orleans, Louisiana—recorded a community, and how, within a particular historical context, the photographers both reflected and participated in the larger culture. Critics may charge that images are ultimately inanimate objects that cannot be assigned agency. I would answer that photographic images take on lives of their own, and that, while their production, distribution, and presentation may be controlled by more sentient beings, photographs—more than texts, more than speech, more than paintings or drawings—can evoke reflection, create emotion, or prompt action.

Through photography, we may acquire information by seeing and, if we choose, acquire the picture itself for reference. Images, and the popular knowledge of them, was far more limited prior to the invention of photography. Carrying around an oil painting was tedious. Drawings, engravings, or lithographs—cumbersome in the original, expensive, but somewhat portable when reproduced—lacked the immediacy and reality of photographs; they appeared to be less accurate and were therefore less convincing. Because photographs, through convention and tradition, purported to represent a physical reality, they carried instant credibility. They were (and still are) ubiquitous, inexpensive, portable, and provoking. Anyone seeking to convince anyone else of anything is greatly aided by powerful images. For the general public, photographs are most often informative or commemorative; by looking at the pictures, an observer absorbs information (or thinks she does); and marriage, graduation, or vacation images may mark important personal events. For an artist, photography is a potential medium, a venue of expression. For a businessman, photographs may be integral components that are incorporated into forcefully persuasive sales and marketing materials. For someone in public life, photographs can make or break careers. And for a historian, photographs may be traps or treasures. Because visual materials are eye-catching and offer a respite from long stretches of text, incorporating appropriate images into historical accounts may help
the reader to understand and the author to further the narrative. Using photographs in this way, however, barely scratches the surface of what may be learned from them.

Effectively employing photographs requires that they be considered from two different perspectives. Images are usually understood, first and foremost, as purely informational sources. Viewers look for content. What is this a picture of? Who is in it? What are they doing? If the content is deemed interesting, more questions emerge. Who took the picture? Under what circumstances? Why? How was it used? This second set of queries points to the other way in which historical photographs should be analyzed—as historical objects themselves. If historians examine photographs as a kind of material culture, as artifacts of another time and place, they become a far richer resource. Answering questions relating to the context of photographs, their creation and usage as well as their content, can make images as interpretively fertile as diaries, letters, documents, and other textual material. Not every picture’s pedigree may be sufficiently traceable; not every picture may be worthwhile (and the same judgment applies to written sources as well). But photographs may convey elusive truths, shrewdly supplying unconscious or implied information about the communities they portray.

Because of its roots in optics and chemistry, photography was first perceived as an exponentially improved way of recording and documenting appearances, a logical way of illustrating texts and written observations. Inventors and pioneers of the process, however, like Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot, were not oblivious to the commercial implications of their discoveries. The ability to produce exact likenesses in a relatively easy, inexpensive way carried with it a great potential for profits, not only among those interested in obtaining supporting illustrations for texts and documents, but among the general population wanting images of loved ones or portraits of special events in their lives. Almost immediately after announcing and demonstrating the process, Daguerre and Talbot both patented equipment for producing photographic
images. Daguerreotypes were not particularly successful, however, until three technical problems were solved. First, an improved lens enabled the daguerreotypist to concentrate more light, thereby producing a more brilliant image in a shorter sitting period for the subject; second, plates were made more light-sensitive, and third, plates began being gilded, which had the two-fold benefit of enriching the tones of the image as well as improving its durability. Upon making these three improvements in the process, portrait studios seemed to open overnight.\(^1\) Other innovations led to other kinds of photographic products—ambrotypes, tintypes, collodion prints—but all were based upon Daguerre and Talbot's invention.

For many interested observers, photography was merely the next step in the evolution of mechanical image-making. Like printing, engraving, lithography, and the later half-tone process, this technological breakthrough was simply the most recent innovation in producing images. Initially at least, the photograph was lauded for theoretically removing man from the mix. No longer would the sensibilities of an artist affect accurate representation; if the production of daguerreotypes is any indication, the operator functioned for the most part as another piece of the equipment. So-called picture factories applied the practice of labor division with a vengeance; polishers and coaters prepared plates, an operator made the exposure, and additional personnel developed the plate, adding gilding for improved tones, and tinting the plate for color. In the galleries that emerged in the 1850s, a sitter purchased a ticket and was positioned by an operator who never left his place behind the camera. A prepared plate was then handed to the operator, the subject's portrait taken, and the plate sent for developing. After developing, gilding, and tinting, the customer presented his ticket in order to claim his picture—the

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\(^1\) Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the present.* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1993), pp. 13–30. This is the best comprehensive, one-volume history of photography currently available.
whole process requiring about 30 minutes. The standard daguerreotype was a “whole plate” that measured 6 1/2 inches by 8 1/2 inches. As the new images became more popular, daguerreotypists offered half, quarter, or sixth plate likenesses as well as smaller versions for lockets and miniatures.

The public enthusiastically accepted this new representational form. The New York Tribune calculated that three million daguerreotypes had been produced in 1853, and the state of Massachusetts recorded 403,626 daguerreotypes taken in the year that ended June 1, 1855. Continuing improvements in the technology and an increasing ability of suppliers to mass produce necessary plates, chemicals, and equipment drove the price of portraits ever lower. An invoice sent in 1850 from Southworth and Hawes in Boston charged a customer $33.00 for a “large” daguerreotype, $8.00 for a “1/4 size,” and $2.50 each for three “small” images. Other establishments charged as little as $2.00 for a 1/6 plate image. Eventually the public could obtain daguerreotypes for as little as 50¢, or 25¢, especially in urban areas with an overabundance of portrait studios. At the same time, itinerant daguerreotypists became regular visitors in less populated areas, stopping in small towns and on farms to sell their new-fangled pictures.

As inventors perfected the photographic process, a widely diverse group of individuals obtained equipment and experimented with the new technology. In addition to the large daguerreotype galleries, smaller, more elite studios catered to the wealthy and famous, producing images such as those created by Mathew Brady and his workers in

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2 Ibid., p. 39.


4 Taft, pp. 63, 467n75; Newhall, p. 30.

5 Newhall, p. 39.
New York and Washington or the Southworth and Hawes studio of Boston. Another kind of photographer experimented with the medium as less a documentary form and more an artistic medium. These photographers, called pictorialists, tried to create images that told stories, imparted morality tales, or mimicked other forms of visual fine arts, composing images that copied well-known paintings, for example. They would manipulate the images, treat the surfaces of prints to resemble paint, and worked to make photographs look like other media. They understood photography as a method of straightforward representation, but for the most part they produced photographs that looked like drawings, paintings, or other conventional, traditional visual portrayals.

A growing group of practitioners were intrigued by the visual and aesthetic possibilities of the technology and explored ways to make new kinds of images that were not simply portraits, documentary records, or photographs trying to be something else. This movement reached full flower at the beginning of the twentieth century as “straight photography” emerged as an art form in its own right. By straight photography, the critic Sadakichi Hartmann, who coined the phrase, meant “rely on your camera, on your eye, on your good taste and your knowledge of composition . . . . compose the picture which you intend to take so well that the negative will be absolutely perfect and in need of no or but slight manipulation.”6 In some ways, Hartmann was calling for a return to the days of the daguerreotype, when fragile plates and processing made retouching and manipulation of negatives impossible. The standard bearer for straight photography and art photography in general was Alfred Steiglitz. Under his autocratic and increasingly imperious leadership, so-called straight photography gained acceptance as an art form and distanced itself from its overtly and obvious commercial counterpart.

Theoretically, distinctions between art photography and commercial photography

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are somewhat illusory, although the categories eventually sorted themselves out in practice. Both kinds of images are produced for money. If an art photographer is to survive on the basis of artistic talent, he or she must sell pictures within the art marketplace of photographic connoisseurs; the commercial photographer is hired to take specific images for an already (usually) designated client. But artistic works are often commissioned, art photographers frequently pay the bills with commercial work, and normally strictly commercial practitioners may dabble in more creative, independent endeavors. The slipperiness of these distinctions is not confined to the economics surrounding application of the technology. The images themselves may be difficult to categorize.

Whether created as art objects, technical illustrations, documentary records, commemorations, or promotional materials, an image has no intrinsic meaning by itself. Viewers attach meaning by bringing to the image an understanding of context, a knowledge of the subject, an awareness of the circumstances of production, or none of the above. By choosing a context, then, a historian may establish a frame of reference for analyzing and interpreting images. A historian of photography may be interested in where a set of images fits within the world composed of photographic images; an art historian may consider camerawork within the larger scope of visual representation in general. And a traditional historian, normally focused on texts and documents and what insights they offer into the past, may confront visual resources that are as problematic as they are rich.

Cultural historians have been quick to explore the profession of photography and

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photographers, but that is not always the best task for someone investigating a subject other than photography itself. In *Reading American Photographs*, Alan Trachtenberg argues "that American photographs are not simple depictions but constructions, that the history they show is inseparable from the history they enact: a history of photographers employing their medium to make sense of their society."

Trachtenberg privileges the photographic process; he is interested in photographs as both reflections of culture and products of culture and does not separate the picture from its maker. His approach is akin to the historian who examines texts through the prism of the printing press, analyzing written materials vis-à-vis their place in the history of printing. This kind of investigation is very valuable, but it must always begin from the perspective of the photographic process, not the events, individuals, or subjects found in the photographs.

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) documentary photographs, for example, have been interpreted from innumerable vantages. From a historical standpoint, they say far more about the New Deal, the FSA, and Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, et al., than they do about their subjects. These images, generally classified as social documentary, were created by outsiders sent to examine an unfamiliar community during a time of great stress, and those outsiders, more artistic activists or photo-journalists, arrived with a Rooseveltian agenda premised upon assumptions about what they would find. What resulted was an archive, no matter how brilliant or evocative, that is a collection of strangers portrayed by strangers. A large body of work has been published about the FSA project including collections of specific images, biographical monographs of the photographers, interpretations that attempt to place the work within the history of social documentary photography, and more recent efforts to interpret the project within its historical context, using pictures and manuscript sources to understand the FSA images.

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as part of larger twentieth-century public policies and personal interactions. Despite their frequent use as visual exemplars of the Great Depression, the FSA images are not the best way to understand any given community during that period.

For a traditional historian who is most comfortable with diaries, documents, and secondary sources, then, what photographic materials may be most useful and where may they throw the most light? This dissertation shows how images may be used to advance what has come to be known as “community studies,” that is, the study of smaller, often geographically defined social units in order to illustrate and understand larger social forces at work within regions, states, or nations. For a historian engaged in community studies, a photographic archive from within the community is the best possible resource. As indigenous visual materials created not by a stranger but by a member of the community, such an archive reveals what inhabitants themselves considered valuable and worthy of commemoration. Working from within the locality with self-generated representations of its citizenry, businesses, tragedies, and celebrations, can give great


insight into the nature of the locale.\textsuperscript{11} Such an investigation is not without its pitfalls; a historian working with materials in this way chooses a \textit{historical} perspective and must be conscientious in evaluating photographs in the two ways described above; as information and as object. A beautiful image that cannot be contextualized within the large community is less useful for historical purposes than a series of less attractive views. "[P]hotographs tend to overpower our critical faculties and our ability to question the image before us," writes Eric Margolis, who encourages perseverance, because "photographs add another dimension; they show us things about existence that words and narrative can only sketch, analyze, describe, gloss over, or romanticize."\textsuperscript{12} A historian must push past the \textit{photography} of an image to its history.

This dissertation differs from previous work in commercial archives in its focus on five primary areas of importance within the maritime community of Galveston, Texas. Less a scrapbook of interesting images or a history of a particular studio, what follows uses photographs from one commercial studio to explore five distinctive aspects of the city. This case study interprets a selected sample of surviving images from the Verkin Studio of Galveston, Texas, and applicable portraits produced by Achille Simon of New Orleans, Louisiana. The Verkin images considered here contain no family photographs, no graduation or marriage portraits, and no souvenir photos, although records indicate that the studio was a full-service commercial photographic enterprise and probably produced those kinds of pictures. The focus of this study is the representation of


industrial objects and operations—the portrayal of commerce and labor—by a participant in the process. The bulk of these images was created by the Verkin Studio at a client’s behest. For that reason, the studio held a strong interest in creating the desired product and gaining approval from its employer. There is no pretense of objectivity in these pictures and no abstract agenda of social reform or artistic achievement. These pictures commemorate or memorialize when so commissioned by a client; probably for that reason, the photographs are generally celebratory and optimistic, portraying potential and success rather than disappointment or failure. There are significant events that occurred during the time period under examination that do not appear in this archive.

In addition to helping to understand the maritime community of Galveston, Texas, during the period 1900–1940, some of the photographs fit in intriguing ways into the larger narrative of visual representation, although that is not the primary focus of this work. Where these images have historical and aesthetic qualities that converge in interesting ways, relevant connections are explored.

Chapter one traces the practice of commercial photography in Galveston and tells the story of the Verkin Studio, its owners, history, clientele, and the eventual preservation of many of its negatives. The second chapter looks at Verkin’s most long-standing and important client—the Galveston Wharf Company—and images created for that enterprise. Placing the wharf pictures in context and exploring their ultimate end use tells much about how the Wharf Company wished to be perceived and how it used photographs to create the desired perception. Analyzing the pictures that the Wharf Company chose for use in programs and promotional materials reveals much about company attitudes toward itself, its workers, and its physical plant. The Verkins created exceptionally strong images for their port clients that may be appreciated for their aesthetic as well as documentary value.

The third chapter explores the waterfronts’ workers, describing a labor force far
more diverse in terms of race, class, and gender than might otherwise be expected and a broad range of tasks and activities. This chapter also includes a selection of ship portraits by New Orleans photographer Achille Simon. Commissioned to create identification materials for transient ship crews, Simon produced haunting portraits of a kind of workforce rarely captured on film. The inclusion of these sailor portraits brings the second kind of waterfront worker to our attention—sailors and merchant seamen. Even though the portraits were taken in New Orleans, they are appropriate to this study given the nature of Gulf Coast maritime commerce. Both ports welcomed many of the same vessels and their crews, and most of the men pictured here probably called at the port of Galveston at one time or another.

Chapter four looks at the Verkins’ ship pictures. As lovers of the waterfront and prime photographers for the Wharf Company, the studio’s principals created a vast archive of ship images that are noteworthy both as a documentary record and as an ongoing example of the centuries-old practice of ship portraiture. The photographs confirm the diversity of shipping in the port and the concurrent operation of a wide variety of watercraft. In addition, the circumstances of the photographs’ production, the way in which the studio produced some of the images and then marketed them to arriving officers and crew, testifies to the perpetuation of a certain kind of ship portraiture practice whose roots lay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The fifth chapter treats a particular event—the Galveston grade raising—and shows how the images of that massive civil engineering project not only document an amazing effort of recovery and revitalization but also reveal in a distinctive and striking way the island’s relationship with the surrounding waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Finally, in recognition of the visual nature of these source materials, an exhibition plan is detailed in the last chapter, outlining how a multi-faceted interpretation of these photographs was organized and displayed in three different museum settings.
Photographs, after all, are objects to be seen, not necessarily read about, and successfully conveying a multiplicity of interpretations within an exhibition format widens the audience for such investigations and proves the possibility of more sophisticated and complex presentations of historical photographs. Just as entries in a single diary may be starting points for the larger project of reconstructing a society or community, a select sampling of images produced by a member of the community may afford the same opportunity.
Chapter One:

"Those Foremost in the Ranks": The Verkin Photo Company

When Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre announced his invention—the daguerreotype—in France in 1839, the production of visual records changed forever. Daguerre and his competitor in England, William Henry Fox Talbot, discovered a way to create images by simply using light and chemicals on a plate or paper surface. News of this magical process, which evolved into what we know as photography, spread quickly across the Atlantic. Daguerre and Talbot were both keenly aware of the commercial potential of their respective discoveries, and they moved rapidly to patent equipment and production processes for generating these new kinds of pictures. By the early 1840s self-taught American daguerreotypists had paid licensing fees and set up shops in all the major cities of the East, and traveling practitioners circulated through the countryside producing the new, inexpensive portraits for those far away from urban centers.¹

Evolution of this young business—professional photography—corresponded to and followed development of technology (and still does). Each innovation or improvement in the process of generating images was a new aspect of service that a local practitioner might incorporate into his or her business. The capability to produce more than one image from a negative, for example, meant that more than one print might be obtained and sold. Mass production of plates and chemicals significantly reduced costs of production and widened the potential market. Prepared plates and paper from a wholesale manufacturer freed the local practitioner from devoting time and energy to the daily fabrication of his materials. Smaller, more easily operated cameras allowed the general public to take pictures but created a need for

professional developing and printing services.²

Moreover, the wider availability of photographic images, coupled with advances in printing and reproduction, opened vast new markets for easily and relatively inexpensively generated images. Photographs, or half-tone pictures and engravings produced from them, began appearing almost immediately in newspapers, magazines, and advertising materials once the technology for incorporating images and text was perfected. The perceived reality or objectivity of the reproduced photographic image made this kind of illustration seem to be more appropriate supporting material for certain kinds of written material. Neil Harris suggests that nothing less than an "iconographical revolution"—comparable to the invention of printing—arose from new kinds of mechanical image production. "In a period of ten or fifteen years [roughly 1885–1900] the whole system of packaging visual information was transformed, made more appealing and persuadable, and assumed a form and adopted conventions that have persisted right through the present."³ A variety of professional photographers supplied the images for these new venues, frequently specializing in specific kinds of views.

The development of a popular press as a lucrative and seemingly bottomless market for photographic images coincided with the rise of the corporation, an entity desirous of selling many different kinds of goods in a growing American marketplace. A need for photographs of corporate products that could be published in conjunction with advertising led big business to develop internal photographic departments charged with producing such imagery. Soon, smaller enterprises, emulating their corporate brethren, hired independent


photographers as needed to create necessary pictures for the same reasons. Businesses “also used photographs in their company magazines to explain their operations to important customers, and to keep their growing white collar workforce informed of internal developments.”\textsuperscript{4} Publications sprang into existence that provided information for the solo practitioner or one-man operation—\textit{Able's Weekly} in 1908, and a spin-off, \textit{The Commercial Photographer}, in 1925.\textsuperscript{5} In 1933 \textit{Scientific American} described how “Photography Works for Industry:” “[P]hotography helps to devise products, photography helps to make products, photography helps to sell products, and photography appears in unexpected places throughout the whole economic and scientific structure.” More specifically, the article described how commercial photography aided tax collection through aerial views, allowed supervision of construction projects at long distance, revealed occurrences “lasting too short a time to be seen,” and, by virtue of x-rays (defined as photography \textit{through} something), permitted the careful monitoring of metal casting and manufacturing because joints and defects could be more easily detected. Not until the last part of the article did the author (affiliated with Eastman Kodak) touch on the technology’s traditional role in advertising and marketing.\textsuperscript{6}

For the general population, the local carte-de-viste studio, a traveling daguerreotypist, or a tintype artist offered an inexpensive way to memorialize a loved one leaving for war, to celebrate a marriage, to remember a dead child or spouse, or to record a family group. To that end, numerous photographic studios opened in cities and small towns alike. The emergence of professional photography in the mid- to late-nineteenth century,


concurrent with the growth of modern corporate practices of manufacture and distribution, meant that photography need not be confined to the major urban centers. Equipment and chemicals could be sent just about anywhere, and the relative portability of cameras and necessary materials made photography available to most of the population throughout most of the country. Civil War views produced by Mathew Brady’s studio in the 1860s and famous landscape photographs taken by Timothy H. O’Sullivan in conjunction with U. S. Geological surveys in the 1880s testify to the ability of camera and operator to take pictures under the most rigorous of conditions. Photography, more than any other visual image-making process, was amazingly democratic (then and now). Almost any subject, in any location, could be photographed, and the resulting image could be widely reproduced and offered freely (or at relatively low cost) to the general public through the popular press, in an exhibition setting (like Brady’s Civil War pictures), or for sale through a gallery. No wonder enterprising men and women rushed to bring this new service to their communities.

The photographic process, introduced to the world in 1839, was not long in arriving in Texas or Galveston. Itinerant daguerreotypists made their ways through the state as early as December 1843, when a certain Mrs. Davis “having lately arrived in Houston with a complete Daguerotype[sic] apparatus, will be prepared on any day to take likenesses, she will remain in the city but two or three weeks; and those who may wish to avail themselves of the opportunity . . . will do well to call at an early date.”\(^7\) Six months after Mrs. Davis, B. F. Neal advertised similar services in Galveston for “a few days.”\(^8\) In 1851 Samuel Anderson “photographist and Ambrotypist” offered his services from an office on Twenty-third street [Tremont] in Galveston. Anderson had owned and operated a studio in New Orleans since 1848 and moved to Galveston after going into partnership with Samuel T. Blessing. After

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\(^8\) *Catching Shadows*, p. viii.
opening their Galveston studio, Anderson and Blessing opened a New Orleans gallery at 120 Canal Street. Anderson ran the Galveston establishment, and Anderson and Blessing, "daguerrean artists," remained in business, with studios in both cities, until 1857, when Anderson sold his interest in the Galveston studio to Blessing and left the area.  

The Civil War severely dislocated Galveston commerce with the city’s attendant occupation and skirmishes, but by 1866 the photographic needs of Galveston were again being met. Craig & Wagner (probably S. T. Craig and W. T. Wagner [or Waggoner]) were operating as photographers from a location on "Tremont bet. Postoffice and Church," an address identical to the Anderson and Blessing office. In addition, three photograph galleries were open nearby: one managed by "E. French" on Market between Twenty-second and Twenty-third Streets, the Lone Star Photograph Gallery on Tremont Street, and the Galveston Photograph Company, "a new gallery on Tremont Street" that promised to provide "Photographic stock, wholesale and retail, albums, cases, frames, etc., etc., of every description and most improved style at low rates." This concentration of photographic studios and galleries in the space of a few blocks continued well into the twentieth century: photographers appear to have moved between two or three of the same locations for decades.  

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10 Catching Shadows, pp. 2–3; A. De Lono, Galveston Directory for 1856–57 (Galveston: News Book and Job Office, 1856), p. 4, hereafter, Galveston City Directory; exact title, compilers, publishers may vary; Galveston City Directory, 1859, p. 3. Many of the older streets in Galveston have two names—a numerical designation and a given name. The city was laid out with north-south running streets having numerical assignments and the east-west streets designated alphabetically. Frequently noted streets in this work include Tremont/Twenty-third street, Kempner/Twenty-second and Water/Avenue A, Strand/Avenue B, Mechanic/Avenue C, Market/Avenue D, Postoffice/Avenue E, Church/Avenue F, Winnie/Avenue G/ Ball/Avenue H/ and Sealy/Avenue I.

11 Galveston City Directory, 1866, p. 8 (Craig and Wagner); p. 11 (first two galleries); p. [128] (quotation).
By 1868 the Blessings had returned to Galveston, operating as Blessing and Brothers from 178 Postoffice Street. John P. Blessing and Solomon Thomas Blessing moved their studio to 180 Tremont in 1870 and added Wilson’s sewing machines to their product line in 1872. While the company’s name was “Blessing and Brother,” John P. Blessing was living in Houston by 1872, and Solomon ran the Galveston branch, employing Philip Rose (who later worked independently) and Louis Eyth as photographers.

Throughout the 1870s at least two photography studios catered to the needs of Galveston, and for some years as many as five different photography businesses are listed. Blessing and Brothers continued to offer pictures and sewing machines from the same location, but they assured photography patrons of “the best equipped gallery in the state” and a willingness “to execute all styles of pictures, from a miniature, in pin or ring, to life-size portraits, in Oil Pastels, Water Color, and India Ink.” F. W. Bartlett, another prominent local practitioner, first appeared as the proprietor of Lone Star Gallery, located at 159 Market Street, just around the corner from the Blessing Brothers, in 1868. Bartlett occupied three different locations—159 Market, 174 Twenty-second Street, and 221-223 Postoffice—all within a single block of each other. By 1880 Mrs. M. E. Pallais operated a “Photograph and Art Gallery” from the 221-223 Postoffice location, and Bartlett worked from his home. During this period a few individuals dominated the photography business in Galveston. Blessing and Brothers maintained a photographic studio, wholesale photographic supply business, and retail sewing machine venture from the same block of Tremont until at least 1884, gradually moving away from the business of producing photographs and toward supplying chemicals and materials to other operators. By 1883 Blessing and Brother were

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12 Galveston *City Directory*, 1868, p. 71.


14 Galveston *City Directory*, 1874, p. 120.
listed only under "Photographers Material" in the city business directory, and Louis Lilienthal had taken over the studio on Tremont.\textsuperscript{15}

In its gushing tribute to the commercial interests of the city, Morrison and Fourmy's business guide championed the local photographic industry in 1882:

So rapid has been the strides toward perfection in the photographic art, the results so gratifying to mechanical and chemical appliances, that it is difficult to forecast to what high degree of excellence this important art will be carried by human ingenuity.

Galveston justly claims those foremost in the ranks, among whom are P. H. Rose, whose gallery and studio would charm and enchant the most fastidious connoisseur, and the evidences of whose exquisite executions are found upon the tables and walls of the rich and poor alike throughout the Southwest; Blessing & Bro. and F. W. Bartlett, whose executions also display taste of the highest art. They, in connection with their photographic art, carry a large assortment of frames, easels, engravings and other novelties; also copying, enlarging and coloring pictures to any size desired.\textsuperscript{16}

This description of the local photographic establishments, as well as an advertisement for F. W. Bartlett that appears in the front advertising matter, indicate the range of services provided by the three businesses and suggest the potential audience. By mentioning that works "are found upon the tables and walls of the rich and poor alike," the guide reinforces the notion that photographs are a relatively inexpensive product available to those of small means. Each practitioner has the capability of producing photographs and may also copy, enlarge, or tint existing images. In addition, clients may purchase accessories for a picture's presentation—frames and easels, for example—or other non-specific pictures—engravings and images from

\textsuperscript{15} Galveston \textit{City Directory}, 1883, p. 426; \textit{Catching Shadows}, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{16} Galveston \textit{City Directory}, 1882, p. 31.
The text and advertisement are clearly meant for a general consumer seeking to purchase pictures for themselves or loved ones. There is no overt appeal to other businesses about the benefits of using photographs in advertising or promotion.

Philip H. Rose, mentioned above, worked for both Blessing and F. W. Bartlett and by 1886 was in business with Marcus E. Schmedling (Rose & Schmedling), advertising to “Solicit Your Patronage and Insure Satisfaction” with “[t]he Finest Cabinet and Card Photographs, The Latest Styles, Photographs of All Kinds” and promising to “Execute All Photographic Work to Perfection.” Their studio was located at 170 Tremont, the previous home of Blessing and Brothers. 18

This location on Tremont (later 420 Tremont with a change in street numbering practices), housed various photographic studios until the 1950s. In May 1888 Justus Zahn, a German immigrant, bought out Philip Rose, advertising on the front cover of the 1887-88 city directory that Justus Zahn was the “successor to Rose and Zahn.” 19 Justus Zahn was born in Marburg, Germany, in 1847 and came to the United States when he was twenty-two. Zahn returned briefly to Germany to serve in the army during the Franco-Prussian War but emigrated after his service to Chicago where he learned photography. From Chicago, Zahn traveled to St. Louis, Missouri; Belleville, Illinois; and finally to Galveston, Texas, where he went into partnership with Philip H. Rose. 20 Zahn’s studio was a busy place. During his

17 F. W. Bartlett advt., Ibid., p. xxii.

18 For Blessing and Brothers, see Catching Shadows, pp. 11–12; Galveston City Directory 1868, p. 71; Galveston City Directory 1870, p. 16, Galveston City Directory 1872, pp. 34, 160; Galveston City Directory 1874, p. 120; Galveston City Directory 1875, p. 94; Galveston City Directory 1876–7, front advt. section, p. 38; Galveston City Directory 1877–8, pp. 13, 196; Galveston City Directory 1878–1879, advt. pp. 1, 17; Galveston City Directory 1880–81, p. 26, Galveston City Directory 1881–2, pp. xxvii, 108.

19 Galveston City Directory, 1886, front cover.

20 For sale of studio to Zahn, see Zahn family papers, 76–0003, Rosenberg Library, box 2, ff 19; for Zahn biography, index and obituary, Zahn family papers, box 1, ff 5.
tenure from 1888 until 1901, Justus Zahn employed and/or trained many of the men who operated photography studios in Galveston for most of the twentieth century. Joseph M. Maurer, Paul H. Naschke, and Paul Verkin all worked with Zahn at one time or another.

Joseph M. Maurer was born in Galveston in 1876. His father was a prominent local contractor, and Joseph attended Catholic schools in the city and then tried his hand at office work. He began working for Justus Zahn in 1893, but after three years Zahn advised him to leave Galveston and to obtain experience at a larger studio somewhere else in the country. Beginning in St. Louis, Maurer worked for several different photographers before returning to Galveston after the 1900 hurricane. Maurer purchased the studio from Zahn and remained in business in that location until 1940.¹¹ Maurer sold the Tremont studio in 1940 to a photographer named Murillo.²²

Paul Naschke began as an apprentice with Zahn in 1890 and later opened his own studio at 420 Twenty-second street, one block from Zahn’s location. A large advertisement with ornamental cherubs announced “Paul H. Naschke, Artist, in Portrait and Landscape Photography. I Make a Specialty of High Grade Crayons, Pastel and Water Color Portraits, Any Style or Size. . . Finest Cabinet and Souvenir Photos, Views of Public Buildings and Private Residences a Specialty. The latest Improved Photographs of All Kinds. Execute All Photographic Work to Perfection. . .”²³ Naschke’s wife, Dell, worked with him as a photoprinter, and by 1896 the couple had moved and opened a studio at 1427 Church, where they would remain in business until 1928. In 1909 they opened a second studio on the mainland in


²²Ava Crofford, The Diamond Years of Texas Photography (Austin: W. Frank Evans, 1975), p. 40. This book is a history of the Texas Association of Photographers, founded in 1898, but because of numerous errors and no index should be used with caution. Verkin’s name is misspelled in the text; confirmation of his election and position may be found in a letter from L. Wygant to Crofford, Verkin Subject file, Rosenberg Library; Galveston City Directory, 1940, p. 594.

the town of La Marque.

Paul Verkin, another of the young photographers who trained with Zahn and whose archive is one of the subjects of this work, was born in Germany in 1862 and emigrated to the United States through New York in 1876. After learning the photographic trade on the East Coast, he first appears as a working photographer in Mexia, Texas, in 1884, and later in Denison, Texas, for the years 1887 to 1892.\textsuperscript{24} The Galveston city directory for 1898 contains a listing for Paul Verkin, photographer, residing at 1925 Avenue O, but no entry appears in the business section.\textsuperscript{25} Maurer noted that Verkin "was associated with" Zahn before and after the 1900 storm.\textsuperscript{26} Paul Verkin continued to be listed in the general city directories as a photographer who resided on Avenue O, and he was the first photographer in Galveston to call himself a "commercial photographer."\textsuperscript{27} He was not included in the business section under "photographers" until 1905, when he opened an office at 2010 Mechanic, and his business listing contained the descriptor, "view photographer." By 1909 he returned to "commercial photographer."\textsuperscript{28} Verkin was active within the photographic community in Galveston. The first local photographic association was formed in Galveston in 1915 with professional photographers and their suppliers as members. Paul Naschke was

\textsuperscript{24} "Early Days Here Recalled . . .," and Catching Shadows, p. 113. Reconstructing the history of Verkin's photography business is made more difficult by an absence of records. Few records were retained when the business closed, and correspondence, ledgers, and client records burned in a warehouse fire in the early 1950s along with significant numbers of negatives according to descendants. Author conversation with William Verkin and Camille Verkin, November 25, 1994.

\textsuperscript{25} Galveston City Directory, 1898, p. 221.

\textsuperscript{26} "Early Days Here Recalled . . ."

\textsuperscript{27} Galveston City Directory, 1901, p. 254.

\textsuperscript{28} Galveston City Directory, 1904, p. 327; 1909, pp. 363, 423.
Paul Verkin and his associate setting up on the pier.
president, and Verkin served as treasurer.29

Verkin’s photography business was a family affair. By 1906 Mulvin Verkin was listed in the city directory as a photographer, and in 1913 Louis M. Verkin and Paul R[oland]. Verkin (Paul Verkin’s sons) were also listed as photographers. In 1914 the Verkins attempted some kind of diversification. The 1914 Directory of the City of Galveston lists two businesses, Verkin Bros. and Verkin Photo Company, as operating from 403 and 406 1/2 Twenty-first street, respectively. Paul R. Verkin and Mulvin Verkin work in both enterprises, while Paul J. Verkin was affiliated with Verkin Photo Company only. Verkin Brothers was apparently short lived; by 1916 Verkin Photo Co. is the only business operating under the Verkin name.30

In 1921 Verkin Photo Company had moved to 2015 Avenue D, just around the corner from their previous location on Twenty-first street, and three years later the business moved to 319 1/2 Twenty-third street, where it would remain until closing in the mid-1950s. Paul Verkin may have preferred to work independently; he is repeatedly listed in the city directories simply as a “commercial photographer” while his son Paul R. Verkin is associated with Verkin Photo Company. By 1926–1927, the elder Verkin was working from his home, supplying that address to the compilers for the city directory category, “Photographers.” Also in that year Louis M. Verkin left the photography business and, with William J. Willmont, opened an office as a stockbroker, claiming to have been “established 1919.” Paul Verkin disappears from the Galveston city directories after 1927. State records indicate that he died in Grayson County, Texas, in 1936. Denison, where Verkin had worked as a photographer before coming to Galveston, is located in Grayson County, and perhaps he retired to that

29 Crofford, p. 309.

30 Gallveston City Directory, 1906, p. 327; 1913, p. 413; 1914, pp. 798, 977; 1916, pp. 589, 684. There appears to be some confusion about the spelling of Mulvin (Melvin) Verkin’s name; both variations appear throughout the series of city directories.
area. His wife, Lillie Bell Evans Verkin, died in Galveston in March 1939.\textsuperscript{31}

The Great Depression was not without impact on the Verkins. In 1930 Louis M. Verkin retained half of his brokerage office but without his partner; by 1932 he was working as a salesman at Tremont Motor Company and Gulf View Motor Company. Melvin Verkin also left the photography company in 1924, perhaps coincident with the shift to 319 1/2 Twenty-third Street, and was working as a car inspector for the Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio Railroad.\textsuperscript{32} By 1932 only Paul Roland Verkin worked as a photographer in Galveston.

In the 1940s a third generation of Verkins began working in the studio. Two of Paul R. Verkin’s sons, Paul R. Verkin Jr. and Camille Verkin, are listed as affiliated with the studio in 1947, but only Paul R. Verkin Jr. followed photography as a profession for any length of time. He opened the Paul Roland Studio in 1947, and when the elder Verkin retired in 1953, his son remained in the photography business until 1957.\textsuperscript{33} Paul R. Verkin retired to League City, Texas, where he lived with his son until his death in April 1958.

The Galveston Wharf Company and other businesses affiliated with or located near the Galveston piers were the primary clients of Verkin Photo Co. The archive produced by the business is an industrial inventory of sorts, documenting structures, ships, processes, and workers that inhabited the docks. With the growth of social history and a greater effort to explore hitherto neglected cultures and communities, urban historians are focusing more and


\textsuperscript{32}Galveston City Directory, 1921, pp. 513, 667 for new office; 1923, p. 517 for Verkin as comm. photog.; 1924–25, pp. 523, 691, for move to 319 1/2 Twenty-third Street; for L. M. Verkin, see 1926–27, pp. 128, 568; 1930, p. 440; 1932, pp. 439; and for Melvin Verkin, see 1924–25, p.523; 1926–27, p. 568.

\textsuperscript{33}Galveston City Directory, 1947, p. 382 for sons in business, p. 609 for Paul Roland studio photo finishing business.
more attention on the industrial underpinnings of cities and regions. In the realm of labor history, and now more frequently social history, waterfronts continue to fascinate and intrigue—the New York Times Magazine featured a photographic essay on the port of New York just last year—and the Verkin collection analyzed here serves as a record of the formerly important Gulf seaport. Unlike current efforts to document historical engineering structures or industrial sites before they are demolished, the Verkin images captured an industrial community with its piers and docks alive with ships, crews, cargos, and longshoremen.34

When Paul R. Verkin closed his studio in the mid-1950s, no one was particularly interested in retaining the negative archive. Eric Steinfeldt, a collector of maritime memorabilia, became aware of the collection by happening into Verkin’s studio one weekend while the elderly photographer was cleaning and sorting prior to vacating the premises. When asked about the images, Verkin offered Steinfeldt all that he could carry and volunteered that there were more negatives stored in a local warehouse. That afternoon and on several subsequent weekends, Steinfeldt shifted the bulk of the maritime images from Galveston to his home in San Antonio, Texas. From there, he worked to place the collection at a museum, library, or archive that would preserve the decades-long record of maritime traffic in Galveston, Texas.

The majority of non-maritime negatives and prints were placed at the Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin. A total of 725 negatives and 402 silver gelatin prints were donated. Their subjects range from the aftermath of the 1900 storm

34 Bruce Davidson, “Water Work,” in New York Times Magazine (August 4, 1996), pp. 28–31; and for industrial documentation, see Jet Lowe, Industrial Eye: Photographs by Jet Lowe from the Historic American Engineering Record (Washington, D. C.: The National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1986). As more and more cities identify their waterfronts—often formerly highly industrialized spaces—as public areas ripe for development, historians and urban archaeologists work to document structures before they are demolished or integrate remaining structures and cityscapes into development plans. Their documentation records “dead” buildings and landscapes whereas a commercial photography archive from the period may capture the area at its most active and economically successful interval.
and subsequent grade raising to construction of various Galveston Wharf Company projects and social activities on the island. Island businesses are represented—Kane Boiler Works, Galveston-Houston Breweries, Inc., the Cotton Concentration Company, and Texas Gulf Sulphur Company—but most of the illustrated industries had a maritime connection or were located near the waterfront. While most of the images are of Galveston scenes, there is also a negative series on oil fields in East Texas. The prints and negatives are overwhelmingly commercial in nature; no pictures of individuals, marriage or graduation images, for example, are included. What few portraits exist were obviously taken in conjunction with broader assignments most likely destined for advertising or promotional materials.\textsuperscript{35} The Galveston and Texas History Center, located at Rosenberg Library in Galveston, Texas, holds some Verkin images, mostly in copy negative form, and scattered throughout their large photography archive. Verkin images are not held as a discrete collection.

The bulk of the collection, primarily of maritime subjects, was donated to Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts (then known as Peabody Museum). During the period 1954 to 1955, Steinfeldt sent nine boxes of negatives—glass plates, nitrate film, and safety film—to the northeastern institution, and they were subsequently accessioned, inventoried, and catalogued. Negatives were catalogued numerically, with no attempt at topical or chronological organization. Of the 3,125 negatives, approximately 80 percent are pictures of steamers that called at the port of Galveston. Freighers, French and German passenger liners, and coastwise steamers of the time are documented, as well as hundreds of U.S. Shipping Board vessels, especially the wooden steamers built along the Gulf Coast in the early part of the twentieth century. Steamship authorities associated with the museum worked to identify the vessels pictured, and a 132-page index was produced that identifies negatives by number, type of negative, ship name or description, type of vessel, former name

\textsuperscript{35}Verkin Photo Company Collection description, Center for American History, single page. Complete holdings at this location were reviewed by the author, September, 1994.
(if available), year built, place of construction, owner or operator of vessel, and any other useful information. The remaining 20 percent of the collection also received negative numbers but is less informatively indexed. Most of these images are described simply as "shore views." Few of the negatives have been printed, perhaps 10 to 15 percent of the total holding. 36

Since what remains of the entire Verkin archive was saved by a maritime collector and is primarily maritime in nature, determining exactly how representative of the entire Verkin family output the surviving negatives may be is difficult. Interviews with family members and Eric Steinfeldt suggest that both Verkins (Paul and Paul R.) concentrated on waterfront subjects out of personal predisposition and that the Galveston Wharf Company and other maritime interests were major clients of the business. Comparing the negatives to extant Wharf Company publications reveals Verkin images in a wide range of company materials that are discussed in later chapters. In addition, references to the Verkin photography business, especially prior to the 1930s, stress the commercial nature of Paul Verkin's work. Besides always referring to himself as a "commercial" or "view" photographer, the elder Verkin never purchased advertising for a studio or solicited business from the general population if city directory entries are representative, and he was later than most Galveston photographers in opening an office. Even after establishing Verkin Photo Company, the business was never listed in the directory as a "studio." Not until after the senior Verkin's death do advertisements for "Verkin's Studio" listing Paul R. Verkin Jr. as proprietor appear in the Galveston Wharf Company Employee Magazine in 1930, probably in exchange for services (there are many Verkin images in the publication). 37 Circumstantial evidence, then,


suggests that the Verkins were commercial photographers in the strictest sense of the word; they took pictures for other businesses—rarely individuals—that were frequently used in advertising and promotional materials. In addition, they produced images less frequently for newspapers or for sale as postcards or souvenir items.

Another effect of this orientation is that the collection is overwhelmingly positive, presenting Galveston and its port in the best possible light. Labor confrontations, pier accidents, and shipping disasters are absent from the collection. The waterfront was not always a congenial place, and major work actions and strikes occurred while the Verkins were in business. Either Verkin did not photograph any of these incidents, or more likely, those images were not included among negatives presented to the various archives.

To a viewer familiar with Galveston history and geography, what the Peabody Essex Museum index classifies as shore views are an especially rich resource. They document various port capital projects, numerous industrial enterprises in Galveston, landmark events such as the grade raising, and daily activities on the wharves. Moreover, many of the negatives identified only by ship name(s) also include distinctive aspects of the Galveston landscape or record the processes of loading and unloading different cargoes. Because of its focus on Galveston’s major industry during this period—ships and shipping—the Verkin Collection is a window onto the piers of the waterfront, and close examination of a selection of images from the studio provides insight into the larger culture and community of Galveston Island in the early twentieth century.
Chapter Two:

"Thousands of Anchor Chains Bind These Wharves to Your Shore"

Galveston and The Wharf Company

When the Galveston Wharf Company voluntarily dissolved itself as a corporation in November 1940, one of the last privately owned wharf companies in the country came under public ownership.¹ Few could imagine Galveston without the Wharf Company. The island owed its settlement and prosperity to its waterfront. The port’s condition—its activity, profitability, the comings and goings of ships and goods—was a prime topic of conversation in boardrooms and across breakfast tables throughout the town. As a major employer and source of business, the Wharf Company held sway over most of those who lived on the Texas sandbar, and its fortunes guided the island economy. The port, however, had become increasingly uncompetitive in a fiercely contested marketplace, and the corporation took action so that the institution could evolve, hopefully improving its position in the region. This final move to public ownership was the culmination of a series of efforts by port stockholders to modernize not only the fabric of the enterprise but also its general presentation. Heavily involved in promotional campaigns, the port had fought for business in an intensely competitive market. The Verkin photographs, discussed below, were integral tools for attracting business to the hardpressed island industry. The Wharf Company and the Galveston Commercial Association recognized and took advantage of the power of images to attract new business and retain existing clients. And Verkin products were also used by the Wharf Company in a variety of publications to inform and encourage employees and to answer and calm increasingly

critical local opposition.²

The Karankawa Indians, Galveston Island’s original nomadic inhabitants, conducted no sea trade, so their opinions on the harbor are unknown. When Spanish explorer Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca floated ashore in 1528, he was interested in treasure, not economic development, and did not remain. Legend has it that empressario Stephen F. Austin, the so-called Father of Texas, observed in 1825 that Galveston was the best natural harbor he had seen. Pirate Jean Lafitte must have agreed with Austin and appreciated the safe anchorage—he had earlier used the island as a base for his privateering operations until he was evicted by the U.S. Navy in 1821. But no permanent attempt to settle the island was made until colonization began under the auspices of Austin and the Mexican government.³ From that time until the early twentieth century, Galveston was site of the region’s best seaport, and that valuable deep water frontage had been owned and developed by powerful leaders of the city and state.

Galveston was designated a Mexican port of entry in 1825 and a small customshouse was constructed in 1830. After the Texas revolution in 1836, Michel B. Menard, through a circuitous series of dealings, secured title to “a league and a labor” (4,605 acres) of land located on the eastern end of the island. Menard and his associates formed the Galveston City Company to sell lots, and the Republic of Texas confirmed the

² Verkin Studio images are held in two locations: Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Ma., possesses the bulk of the negatives, approximately 3,125. Another 725 negatives and 402 silver gelatin prints are the property of the Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. A relatively few negatives are in private hands, and many more were destroyed by a warehouse fire prior to the studio’s closing in 1956. Images discussed in this essay come from both publicly held collections.

company charter. By the end of 1838, over sixty families and at least one hundred buildings comprised the newly formed city, and the Texas Congress granted it a city charter in 1839.\textsuperscript{4}

As early as 1838 the island’s first wharf was built by Ephraim McLean at the foot of Eighteenth Street. Others soon followed. Central Wharf was built in 1840 and Thomas F. McKinney and Samuel May Williams, two of Menard’s partners, built a store and warehouse on the island. When these structures were destroyed in a hurricane, the partners rebuilt, adding a wharf and the first Tremont Hotel.\textsuperscript{5} On February 4, 1854, six of these investors combined to form The Galveston Wharf and Cotton Press Company, a “semi-public company possessing a capital stock estimated to be one million dollars.”\textsuperscript{6} By 1860 seven of the ten existing wharves operated under company ownership. An ongoing dispute between the city of Galveston and the Wharf Company over ownership of sand flats along the waterfront was settled by a court decree of April 1, 1869, and confirmed by the state legislature in 1870.\textsuperscript{7} As a result, the city of Galveston was given one-third of the Wharf Company stock and allowed to name three members of its Board, although the city stock held no voting rights and city-named board members could not vote. This arrangement effectively gave the Wharf Company monopoly control over the waterfront as well as exemption from taxation on that portion of the company property (one-third) owned by the city. A subsequent writer on the subject described the settlement

\textsuperscript{4}McComb, pp. 42–43.


\textsuperscript{6}Fornell, p. 16. On February 11, 1854, the charter was amended to change the name to The Galveston Wharf Company, its more familiar moniker.

\textsuperscript{7} Greene, p. 88.
as granting "monopolistic control by a private corporation of a necessary public utility" and accused the company of abusing its position, charges that would haunt the business throughout its existence.

Despite some local grumbling, the waterfront prospered under this arrangement. Galveston was the only place on the Texas Gulf Coast where shipping could move from interior rivers and bayous to the Gulf of Mexico and vice versa. Currents sweeping around Bolivar peninsula and the eastern end of the island cut a channel through the shallow waters and permitted entry to Galveston Bay. Craft requiring little depth of water brought cotton and other agricultural products downstream from the state's interior and across the bay for shipment out of Galveston. Incoming manufactured goods and immigrants arrived in Galveston for distribution throughout the state and the Midwest.

Texas's earliest—and easiest—transportation routes involved the sea. While land routes would gradually emerge, entry to the state by way of Galveston and Gulf Coast harbors was by far the most economical way for people and their possessions to arrive. Likewise, the growing bounty produced by the region—cotton, foodstuffs, raw materials—could best be moved by ship. By the time railroads appeared on the scene, there were already trading patterns that had developed because of these water-based transportation networks. Railroad building offered an opportunity for Galveston to further assure its place as the commercial center of the state, but railroads also made it possible for other cities to challenge Galveston's position. Determining railroad routes in the state became the most important issue of the 1850s. Three factions developed. The plan most advantageous to the island—the Galveston Plan—called for the placement of

lines that would converge at the island city, forming a system that would move goods from the Midwest and Plains states southward to Gulf ports for shipment. The so-called State Plan called for the construction of trackage built, owned, and operated by the state of Texas that would also run toward the Gulf and meet at Galveston. The Corporate Plan was formulated by railroad entrepreneurs who believed that a combination of state-granted land and loan assistance plus private investment was the best way to create a rail system for the state. The drawback for Galveston was that the major promoters of the Corporate Plan were "a loose coalition of transcontinental ‘paper railroaders’ . . . who expected to profit from a Texas railroad system which connected their inland city with the great transcontinental lines." This plan, based upon concentrating rail lines in Houston, most threatened Galveston’s position as the economic and commercial center of the state. Proponents of the Galveston and State Plans feared that railroad centralization in Houston would lead to the bypassing of the port city and joined forces to fight the Corporate advocates. The bitter political battle ended in 1856 when the state legislature passed the Loan Bill, a compromise measure providing for the construction of a state rail system by private corporations supported by generous state aid. In large measure the Corporate Plan had won.9

Besides losing ground in the railroad decision, Galveston’s position as an island worked to the city’s disadvantage. A cedar and pine railroad bridge connecting Galveston to the mainland was completed in 1860. A hurricane in 1867 destroyed this structure and was replaced in 1868. That bridge lasted until the devastating 1900 storm. Additional railroad bridges were built in 1877 and 1896, but a connection for wagons or pedestrian

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9 Final resolution of this issue hinged upon the attitudes toward slavery of leaders of the State Plan. Personal attacks and political chicanery were heavily involved in the outcome. For more details, see Fornell, pp. 158–79.
traffic was not completed until 1893. It too was destroyed in 1900 and not replaced.  

A new causeway to the island was not completed until 1910. This new project was described as "the world's largest bascule bridge" and financed by Galveston County. Designed in cooperation with the railroads, the roadway consisted of a highway, railroad tracks, and a steel roller lift bridge in the center. The bridge was leased to the railroads for ninety-nine years after completion. In addition to a relatively tenuous connection to the mainland, space on the island was at a premium. Since the Wharf Company controlled all of the developed waterfront area, it also controlled rail access to the property and was unwilling to permit private investment. It built a wharf railway in 1874 to connect the port to outside rail lines but guarded its prerogatives fiercely.

During the nineteenth century, the cities of Galveston and Houston jockeyed for position, cooperating and competing in a contest for economic supremacy. The channel sweeping around the east end of Galveston Island was the best conduit anywhere along the Texas coast to the deep water of the Gulf of Mexico, and in the beginning the city of Galveston was the primary port of entry to the region. As it was, there were still two sandbars that had to be negotiated for entry to the port. Ships arrived at high tide or transferred their goods to lighters that could travel in shallower water. Vessels came into Galveston and off-loaded cargos that were then put upon barges or other flat-bottomed craft for transportation across Galveston Bay and up rivers and bayous into the interior of the territory. Houston, at the furthest navigable point on Buffalo Bayou, which emptied into Galveston Bay, was a logical point of trans-shipment, and Houston

10 McComb, pp. 53–54.


12 Greene, p. 88.
eventually became a distribution center for the region. A single rail line, the Galveston, Houston, & Henderson Railroad (G.H. & H.), connected the island to Houston via Harrisburg, but Galveston definitely lost ground when the state legislature determined the overall railroad building plan for the state. As the region grew, Galveston became Houston’s deep water port, and Houston became Galveston’s distribution center.

The first steam packet line promising regular service opened in Galveston in 1837; operated by Charles Morgan, it ran between New Orleans and Galveston. In 1848 service was extended to Port Lavaca, Indianola, and Brazos St. Iago (near present-day Brownsville, Texas), and in 1858 Sabine Pass was included. By 1867 Rockport and Corpus Christi were regular stops also. These steamers ran two or three times weekly from Galveston and offered regular scheduled service. The only competition to Morgan’s service at this time were tramp sailing vessels traveling from port to port by less regular, less dependable schedules. Not until after the Civil War did steam vessels begin regular service between the Gulf Coast and eastern ports. Morgan further assured his place in the transportation network by purchasing or controlling the rail lines running parallel to the coast from Texas to Louisiana, lines that threatened his water trade.\(^{13}\)

As the southwestern transportation networks became more sophisticated, water carriers began to integrate rail and water into a single distribution system. Following similar moves toward corporate consolidation that were occurring nationwide, companies sought to capture and control the entire process of transporting goods and people over land and water. They competed for advantageous waterfront space, discounted services, and privileged positions within the ports and rail yards. Morgan found his Galveston position challenged by the Mallory lines after 1865. That year, the Mystic, Connecticut,

and New York City–based steamship operator began weekly service between New York and Galveston. After a period of shrewd purchases and mergers, the Mallory ships were the sole carriers on that route after 1869.  

Regularly scheduled steamers provided by the Mallory lines improved the port’s connections to the Northeast and expanded available services. The Wharf Company moved quickly to encourage this enterprise, granting prime dock space and reducing wharfage charges. City businesses and entrepreneurs also invested in four new Mallory vessels, and the Mallorys in turn bought Wharf Company stock. Mallory vessels were allowed shipside rail transfers and through rates, a benefit never extended to Morgan ships. 

Morgan watched these actions with growing anger. To add insult to injury, the Wharf Company retracted privileges and rebates granted to him in the 1850s, and vessels arriving from New Orleans were frequently quarantined—unlike the Mallory ships from New York. Morgan answered with a rate war and increased competition. He began a New York-New Orleans route in 1871 and won a lawsuit over the quarantines in 1873. In addition, he began to upgrade facilities in Indianola and Houston in order to challenge Galveston’s primacy on the coast. He purchased railroads that would connect his existing operations in Indianola to the interior, chiefly San Antonio, thereby expanding the company’s control of the total transportation infrastructure. “[It will be] Mr. Morgan’s steamers coming up the bay and landing at Mr. Morgan’s wharf, and Mr. Morgan’s cars going down, and Mr. Morgan’s men rolling the freight off the steamers right on the cars;  

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14 For the arrival of the Mallory lines, Ibid., p. 365.

passengers likewise stepping off the steamers right on the train . . .”

That particular scheme of Morgan’s never bore fruit. He eventually abandoned his efforts to control the interior rail lines between San Antonio and Houston but shifted his attention to Houston’s struggle to gain a deep water channel to the Gulf of Mexico. Despite some early cooperation to assure rail termination at the coast, competition between Houston and Galveston was increasing. Houston worked to develop a dense system of rail connections that would tie the interior to the Bayou City. Such centralization would then need only a deep water outlet to completely bypass Galveston and to assure commercial supremacy.

Morgan was happy to oblige. Stung by what he perceived to be Galveston’s defection to the Mallorys, Morgan first established rail connections between Houston and New Orleans and by September 28, 1880, Morgan-controlled railroads operated the first all-rail line between the two cities. Of greater importance, the city of Houston had been trying since 1869 to secure private investors to dredge a channel from Galveston Bay through Buffalo Bayou. The project had founded for lack of funds, poor management, and refusal of assistance from the federal government. The Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company—Houston’s vehicle for this effort—then looked to Charles Morgan. The two combined forces, with Morgan agreeing to dredge a channel in return for unissued capital stock and free right-of-way for his ships. The channel was completed on April 21, 1876, and with the addition of a short rail line connecting the waterfront to the city, Houston and the Morgan Line completely bypassed Galveston and its Wharf Company. By September of that year, people and cargos could enter and leave Texas via New Orleans without setting foot on Galveston Island. At its peak, the Morgan Line operated ten

16 Samuel H. Canfield, Port Lavaca, to Editor, December 18, 1871, in New Orleans Republican, December 31, 1871, as quoted in Baughman, “Rail-Water Systems in the Southwest,” p. 367.

17 Ibid., pp. 372–74.
steamships, two steamboats, thirty-two schooners, seven steam tugs, and eighteen barges in its Houston service. ¹⁸ Morgan irritated his civic partners, however, by charging a toll to pass through the canal he constructed connecting San Jacinto and Galveston Bays. It was less expensive for Morgan vessels to come and go from Houston, but Morgan’s toll meant that Galveston still maintained a competitive advantage for other shippers. ¹⁹ The route to Houston was longer; the channel was only eight feet deep; and the water level was prone to fall in drought.

Morgan and Mallory, while locked in this intense competition, found themselves faced with another threat from beyond Texas. The rapid growth of rail transportation throughout the Midwest meant that farmers could ship completely by rail via St. Louis to New York for export. Midwestern farm products did not have to pass through Texas’s seaboard ports to reach northeastern markets. To combat this development, the Morgan and Mallory companies signed the first of several secret agreements equalizing sea rates among their routes in 1878. That enabled them to focus on keeping commerce moving via the coastal ports rather than by rail northward. The port of Galveston, still closer to deep water and better equipped, prevailed in this early round of competition with Houston.

Within a larger national context of massive rail purchases, mergers, and consolidations, Morgan and Mallory worked to improve access to the interior for their non-competing water trade. This resulted, by 1885, in what James Baughman calls “a rail-water duopoly” with Galveston and Mallory connecting to Jay Gould’s Santa Fe system in St. Louis and the Morgan Lines working through the Southern Pacific system from San Francisco to Houston, New Orleans, and New York. ²⁰ By 1890 the two


¹⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

different networks reached an agreement on rates that would protect the status quo until government regulatory scrutiny in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{21}

Galveston maintained its one great advantage (deep water access) during these maneuverings, and the Wharf Company and the city worked to capitalize on that position. In 1881 prominent Galveston businessmen formed the Deep Water Committee to guard the port’s interests in various state and national forums and to work for the deepening of the all-important channel. Membership on the committee was confined to the elite and powerful; most participants were bank and corporate leaders, and some served on the Wharf Company board as well. This committee played a leadership role in securing federal support for deep water access in Galveston and expanded its activities to include municipal reform and the establishment of a commission form of government after the 1900 storm.

As the state continued to grow, amounts of imports and exports increased rapidly, and the size of ships carrying goods grew as well. But the persistence of the sandbars impeding channel access seriously limited the vessels that could call at the port and continued to require the offloading of most cargos. Government leaders began to agitate for federal funding to deepen the channel into Galveston. Interest in such an effort increased dramatically after an 8-foot bar obstructing the mouth of the Mississippi had been successfully eroded by constructing jetties that caused a scouring action across the passage.\textsuperscript{22} Growth in traffic and activity on the upper Texas coast also caused the federal government to establish the Galveston Engineer Office in 1880, precursor to the

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 379–80.

Galveston District of the Army Engineer Corps. The most pressing matter facing the new engineering officer, Major Samuel M. Mansfield, was the depth of the outer bar at the entrance to Galveston harbor. Local and state leaders believed that building jetties around the Galveston channel similar to those near the Mississippi River would cause comparable scouring action that would wear away the sandbars hampering entrance to the bay. For the next decade, limited funding and conflicting ideas about how to accomplish the deepening would prevent any successful action toward that goal.

By 1889 the federal government perceived a need to support development of a single deep harbor in the Gulf of Mexico west of New Orleans. Trade conventions held from Texas into the Midwest had called for such ports to serve the distribution needs of the plains; producers in the region wanted easier and cheaper ways to export their goods to world markets. John Evans, a Denver businessman and governor of Colorado, lobbied incessantly and effectively for Galveston, viewing the Gulf Coast seaport as Denver’s outlet to the world. In March 1889 Congress directed the secretary of war to appoint a committee of three engineers—Henry M. Robert, George Lewis Gillespie, and Jared A. Smith, all lieutenant colonels in the Army Engineer Corps—to survey the western coast of the Gulf to ascertain the best location for such a deep water port. In their report submitted in December of that year, the engineers selected Galveston as the most likely candidate. The island city had the largest nearby area of deep water, the most central location, and the best railroad facilities of any location considered. The panel also recommended that the federal government pay for jetty construction as soon as possible to secure the necessary depth of channel. Once an ongoing funding commitment was assured, construction of harbor improvements proceeded rapidly. Washington provided

\[23\text{ Ibid., p. 41.}\]

\[24\text{ Ibid., pp. 41–52.}\]
both engineering expertise and money, and by 1897 northern and southern jetties had been completed. On May 16, 1897, the *Belgian King* crossed the outer bar drawing 24 feet, 7 inches.\(^{25}\)

The Galveston Wharf Company announced plans to expand the port’s facilities in May 1890, a decision no doubt calculated to reinforce and justify Galveston’s selection for deep water. The Wharf Company would replace the worn wooden wharves with stone bulkheads, filling with rocks and sand the sandflats behind the new enclosures. These new piers would be far more sturdy and better able to handle the expected heavier cargos and railroad traffic. The Wharf Company also planned to reconstruct and extend Pier 33 from Twenty-ninth Street to Thirty-fifth Street with eventual growth to Forty-first Street, the far western boundary of the company’s property.\(^{26}\) In addition to Galveston improving its facilities, the ports of Houston and Texas City moved quickly to take advantage of the deepened channel. Once in Galveston Bay, ships would be able to travel to any docks or wharves that could provide necessary services. This gave impetus to the two cities to create or expand their capabilities.\(^{27}\)

While Houston and Galveston had worked together against efforts to make rail transport through cities in the northern part of the state—Dallas and Fort Worth—the primary path for goods, the railroad plan that was enacted and the Morgan and Mallory


\(^{26}\) Greene, “Sandbar to Seaport,” p. 89.

\(^{27}\) Alperin, pp. 55, 91.
gentlemen's agreement over sea rates gave Houston some distinct advantages. Deep water notwithstanding, freight rates worked against Galveston for most of the last part of the nineteenth century. The “differential” used in figuring rate schedules would be a point of conflict for the two cities from the 1880s until the early twentieth century. Shippers calculating the cost of sending goods to Galveston from the interior would take the rail rate to Houston and then add the cost of water transport from Houston to Galveston, an amount usually more than the actual cost of shipping entirely by rail. Sending goods from Galveston meant taking the rail rate from Houston and adding the “arbitrary,” again calculated on the basis of the water rate from Houston to Galveston. Thus figured, the difference in rates in shipping between Houston and the interior and Galveston and the interior was kept artificially high and rarely based on the real costs of transport. This system of rate calculation was the product of complex negotiations among the major players in rail-water transportation in the region and the final step in consolidating a rail-water network that would be in place until the 1930s.  

What began as a feud between major shippers and the Wharf Company in Galveston contributed to establishing the rate differential and initiating efforts for a deep water port inland, further improving Houston’s economic position vis a vis the island port.  

Even after Galveston was selected in 1889 as a deep water port eligible for federal funding, Houston never abandoned the hope for its own major port facility. Morgan’s effort had proven the goal feasible, and two other events gave such a plan added impetus.

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28 Baughman, “Evolution of Rail-Water Systems” p. 377. This system of rate calculation was the product of complex negotiations among the major players in rail-water transport in the region and the final step in consolidating a rail-water transportation network that would be in place until the 1930s.

29 Ibid., the rate differential wall was breached in 1931 through a decision regarding freight charges for cotton issued by the Texas Railroad Commission. That body held that effective May 28, 1931, rates on cotton from within 100 to 200 miles of Houston would be the same as those from Houston. Shipper's Digest, Vol. III (December 24, 1930), p. 9.
The hurricane in 1900 that devastated Galveston Island was strong evidence of that city’s vulnerability. With thousands dead and piles of wreckage instead of buildings, few observers believed that the port emerged unscathed. Even though the channel was unharmed and cargos were moving three weeks after the storm, shippers and businessmen viewed the damaged piers and wondered about the possibility of future catastrophes. Only four months later, Spindletop ushered in the oil boom, and Houston leaders glimpsed an opportunity. After half a century of almost equal growth, the storm’s destruction and the discovery of oil nearby seemed timed to push Houston ahead in its economic race with Galveston.

While Galveston was busy rebuilding, constructing a sea wall, and raising the island’s grade, Houston lobbied successfully for federal funds to deepen the channel in Buffalo Bayou. This early effort resulted in an increased depth of eighteen-and-one-half feet. Combining a local bond issue with more federal support, Houston leaders were able to contract for a channel twenty-five feet deep to be dredged from Bolivar Roads to the Turning Basin, only a few miles from the center of the city. When officially opened on November 10, 1914, thousands of citizens lined its banks for a twenty-one gun salute, a cannon fired by Woodrow Wilson via remote control, band music, and the mayor’s daughter tossing white rose petals into the water. Further deepening and widening of the Houston ship channel in 1919 made waterborne commerce even more hotly contested

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30 Galveston News, September 28, 1900.


32 Vela and Edwards, p. 47.
along the Texas coast. Traffic to the interior city remained light as ships were wary of reported shoal waters and unreliable depths in certain areas. But more and more vessels attempted the passage, especially those transporting oil and other petroleum-based products. The circuitous route of the Houston Ship Channel provided vast acreage for refineries and holding tanks, thereby encouraging newly formed oil companies to build processing facilities and ship directly from company docks.

Once the feasibility of channel dredging was proven by Houston, other communities on the coast quickly petitioned for such assistance as well. In rapid succession, Freeport (1925), Corpus Christi (1926), and Brownsville (1936) benefited from federal largesse and acquired deep water access. As these new ports entered the market, the rivalry between Houston and Galveston intensified, and the Galveston Wharf Company found itself threatened from without and within.

Not only was the Wharf Company challenged by a larger, more modern neighbor to the north and improved facilities elsewhere, but also some islanders believed the corporation to be an abusive monopoly that did not operate in the best interests of its community. In a series published in the Galveston News, E. L. Wall attacked the company, claiming that “Galveston has been a fief of the Galveston Wharf Company since 1869.” He went on to blast the port for “lagging behind the march of progress, while competing ports appropriate an increasingly larger share of the business which


Galveston must depend upon for sustenance."³⁵ Not only had the Wharf Company failed to meet the challenge from competing ports, Wall claimed; its arrangement with the city was ultimately unprofitable. Since the city owned one-third of the stock, one-third of the port’s assets were exempt from taxation. And the disincentive to increase the assessed value was that any increase in taxes paid would mean a decrease in dividends. As it was, charged Wall, monies received by the city represented in fact the dividends from only one-fourth of the stock, since the Wharf Company had increased the company’s outstanding stock by 7,600 shares without increasing the city’s one-third interest. The 6,222 shares of stock held by the city represented one-third of the 18,666 shares outstanding in 1869, the year that the city was made a one-third owner, not one-third of the 26,266 outstanding shares in 1928. So the city was receiving dividends on about one-fourth of the stock, an amount less than what the local government would receive from taxes had it held no stake in the company. In addition, while the city named three members of the Wharf Company Board of Directors, the city’s stock held no voting rights. "Never within corporate history did the city of Galveston contract such a disastrous alliance."³⁶

The Galveston Wharf Company was besieged. Even before the highly critical series by E. L. Wall, George Sealy, then president of the Wharf Company, addressed detractors in a speech before the Rotary Club on February 15, 1928. "History of the company was recited," the News reported primly, "while continued expansion was pledged." Sealy claimed that the Wharf Company supported improvements to undeveloped areas but not the granting of tax exemptions that would give new businesses an unfair advantage over existing concerns. He defended the Wharf Company’s profits,


³⁶ Ibid., p. 2.
asserting that "since 1874 this company has never paid a higher dividend than six percent
... no great fortunes accruing to the holders of this stock, as many are inclined to
believe." He righteously attacked critics for threatening women and children since "fifty-
two per cent of our stockholders are women and among the charities numbered as such
are St. Mary's Orphan Asylum, St. Mary's Infirmary and Sanitarium, Hebrew
Benevolent Society, Harmony Lodge, Oakwood Cemetery, Rosenberg Library, The
Rosenberg Women's Home, Bayland Orphan's Home... and woe betide that man or
group of men who through unjust criticism and abuse of this company would jeopardize
the value of these investments." He concluded that "this company was not built by a few
individuals for their own benefit but rather as a great institution for the general good of
this city.... Others have prospered to a far greater degree through its being here than
those who have built and managed it... stevedores, longshoremen, steamship agents,
brokers, marine shops, dredgeboats, tugboats, drydocks, ship chandlers, provision
houses, compresses, draymen, cotton factors and others... this company will continue
to expand and improve its facilities as occasion requires and endeavor to maintain its
position as the most efficient port in America." 37

In addition to sending its president to deliver speeches, the Wharf Company
began participating more directly in efforts to promote the island and by developing
publications aimed at potential clients, employees, its city owner, and the entire island
population. Members of the Wharf Company board served in a consolidated commercial
association, and marketing brochures, an employee magazine, and widely distributed
public relations materials were produced to sell the company to its customers and its
community. Commercial photography played an integral role in these efforts, and the
Wharf Company recognized the power of images in such communications. 38 In the


38 For the early development of commercial photography for corporate purposes, see
foreword to a history of the company prepared for stockholders and interested individuals, board president George Sealy opined, "if these pictures can serve as an inspiration to the present generation and those to come in realizing the vision and unselfish devotion those old pioneers had in the development of this city and port, we feel this little publication will have been well worth while." As it trumpeted ongoing operations, celebrated expansion, and communicated with its employees, the Wharf Company used Verkin Studio photographs to spread its message. And besides placing Verkin images in its own publications, the Wharf Company allowed them to be used in other island marketing materials. Viewed decades later, the images document not only port activities, but also reveal the Galveston Wharf Company's attitudes toward itself, its clients, and its workers.

The Wharf Company was not the first entity to promote its activities or the island. In 1911, three groups that worked to promote Galveston had combined to form the Galveston Commercial Association. This organization concerned itself with trade, rail and water rates, entertaining important guests, encouraging conventions, expanding local industry, and general island development. As the primary commercial entity of the island, the Galveston Wharf Company participated heavily in the efforts of the Commercial Association. Members of Galveston's Deep Water Committee dominated the new board of directors charged with coordinating activities of the various subcommittees, and the


overall tenor of the organization favored encouraging the island’s principal business: the port. 41 Merging the groups was highly successful. Membership nearly doubled and by 1914 approached 1800; dues totalled nearly $50,000 annually. 42 Throughout the 1920s, the Commerical Association published books touting the port’s superior position; by the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Wharf Company began developing its own promotional materials.

The port sold itself as “America’s Port of Quickest Dispatch,” claiming to be “40 minutes steaming time” from the open sea. 43 In an article on port development published in the Shippers Digest, an unidentified author stressed that “it is worth mentioning again that the center of the Galveston waterfront is just ten miles from the deep water of the open sea. How important that is to ship operators and shippers may be understood when it is known that a vessel can reach deep water and the sea room within 40 minutes after casting off her lines at the dock in Galveston. This is something that cannot be accomplished at any other port on the Gulf coast.” 44 For decades, this was the primary promotional theme of the port both in internal publications to inform and improve morale and in materials created for potential clients and persistent critics.

The Wharf Company also began publishing an employee magazine, the Galveston Wharf Company Employee Magazine (GWCEM) in 1929 and printed the following “Introductory” on its first page:

41 Barker, pp. 75–76.

42 Barker, p. 76.


The purpose of the publication is to provide for the employees a medium for exchange of views and opinions; to acquaint them with news items and happenings affecting their co-workers. In doing so, it is hoped to bring about a little closer contact with one another, promote good-fellowship and strengthen ties of friendship.

It will be the purpose of the magazine, through this channel, to keep the employees informed of the activities and progress of the company.

The success of any enterprise is largely dependent upon the loyalty and efficiency of its personnel.

Every employee has some specific duty to perform and, no matter how trivial the task may appear, he is an important cog in the wheel.

We are all members of one big, happy family, boys. Let us work together, ever mindful that “that which is worth doing at all is worth doing well.”

Clearly an attempt by the company to encourage employees to identify with their employer and to take pride in their work, the small pamphlet was devoted to cataloguing day-to-day operations, to informing workers of company decisions that might affect working conditions, and to publicizing general news and harmless gossip about various employees. By the time publication ceased in 1935, the originally semi-monthly schedule had been reduced to a monthly issue, and the volumes contained no new imagery—the photographs that were used had been shot early during the publication’s history and been used repeatedly for years. Verkin photographs appeared throughout the early issues, and the studio advertised in the back pages as well. It is unclear whether the studio received the publicity in exchange for services, but the number of photographs contained in the

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46 See, for example, GWCEM, III, (October 1, 1931), p. 6 and III, (November 16, 1931), back page.
publication decreased dramatically when the Verkin advertisements ended in 1934.

In addition to the *GWCEM*, another publication began concurrently, the *Shippers Digest*, and kept waterfront activity in the public eye. Unlike the *GWCEM*, the Digest was targeted at users of the wharf facilities. It stressed the high level of activity, the variety of shipping, and the delivery of myriad services to clients of the port. Departures and arrivals were recorded, and interesting cargos or passengers duly noted. The journal was published weekly by Muller Publishing Company, and the Wharf Company consistently advertised on the inside cover, frequently using images from the Verkin Studio. Many of the Verkin images I will discuss in this study probably were taken for or appeared in *Shippers Digest*. This publication included an increasingly large section of advertising, some of which also contained images produced by Verkin.47

Besides the *GWCEM* and *Shippers Digest*, numerous other publications and brochures produced by the Commercial Association and the Wharf Company utilized images of the port provided by Galveston photographers. One Verkin product, a sweeping port view dated “11/20” (V-2525), was used for many years in several editions of the Commercial Association’s primary publication.48 This image, taken from an elevated position looking westward down the channel, shows piers crowded with all manner of water craft. Snapper schooners (special sail-equipped fishing boats used to catch the scarlet fish offshore), steamers, and vessels combining sail and steam, line the shore and wrap from left to right across the horizon. A tug and small passenger vessel

47 For example, see below, note 55, advertisement for Diamond Rubber Belting Company.

48 Galveston Commercial Association, *The Port of Galveston: Handbook of Information on the Wharfage and Rail Terminal Facilities, Coal and Fuel Oil Bunkering Equipment, Dry Docks, Marine Railways and Repair Shops, With Complete Information on Port and Stevedoring Charges At the Port of Galveston, U.S.A. With Historical, Descriptive and Statistical Data on the Port’s Commerce*, (Galveston: Port of Galveston) 1922 (inside cover); 1925, p. 52; 1928, p. 48. The image was also used in the *Shippers Digest*, II, (November 27, 1929), p. 10; II, (May 23, 1930), inside cover.
appear to be watching from mid-channel, monitoring the waterfront activity or waiting for space to open along the docks. Besides indicating that Galveston harbor was a busy place, the photograph is especially effective in documenting the kind of shipping traffic present during this period. Not only were both sail and steam working concurrently, they shared multi-use facilities in the same port. The fishing fleet, small cargo operations, and large freighters negotiated for space along the same waterfront. This emphasized the Wharf Company's claim to versatility as well as provided interesting and useful documentation for future maritime historians.

A glass plate negative, the image is clear when processed as a contact print. When enlarged, the picture loses some focus, possibly a limitation of the technology of the time or the skill of the photographer. This sweeping view is pleasing to the eye, its composition logical and straightforward. The subject—a waterfront full of ships—begins in the lower left corner and moves in a curve across the field of view. That this was an especially effective image is proven by its use for many years in port and commercial association materials. The picture seeks to convey the power and strength of the port in a quantitative way. It shows miles of piers and many ships, implying vast amounts of dock space (a chief competitive edge claimed by Houston), warehouse capacity, and an equally large ability to service any kind of water craft or cargo. As evidence of progress and efficiency, capability and capacity, the bustling port was exactly the impression that the Galveston Wharf Company wanted to convey.

Other Verkin images illustrated the range of services provided by the port. The program for the dedication of Elevator “B”, a new grain handling facility, used images to create “an impression that here is not only mass of structure, but also power, real giants, doing their work under the direction of trained men. . . . That these things are true may be
verified from a scrutiny of accompanying pictures.\textsuperscript{49} The Wharf Company was counting on the cultural acceptance of photographs as bearers of visual truth, using the images and their accompanying text to create an industrial narrative of successful competition. Five of the images under examination in this essay (CN08155, CN08156, CN08157, CN08158, and CN08159) appeared in or were produced by the Verkin Studio in conjunction with the dedication program. Besides being published in the program, these images also appeared in the \textit{Shippers Digest}.\textsuperscript{50} The formal dedication ceremony was held at 2:00 P.M., on May 9, 1931. Lon A. Smith, then chairman of the Texas Railroad Commission, delivered the main address with additional presentations by local dignitaries.\textsuperscript{51} Since the Texas Railroad Commission controlled rail rates across the state and arbitrated disputes between shippers, the presence of its chairman contributed to an air of importance attached to the elevator. Less than three weeks later, the commission issued its ruling on cotton freight rates, breaking the stranglehold of the differential and improving Galveston's competitive position. A seventeen-page program was created for the event, containing detailed descriptions of the capabilities of the new facility and accompanied by seventeen black and white photographs. The new elevator, according to the text, was "the most modern and efficient structure of its kind in the country [sic]... the largest port elevator in the United States."\textsuperscript{52} "Galveston's newest instrument of commerce" could handle six million bushels of grain, and the program went on to detail each aspect of that process. The photographs identified above were used to illustrate those

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Galveston Wharf Company Dedicates Elevator "B"}, program, dated May 9, 1931, Galveston Wharf Company vertical files, Rosenberg Library, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Shippers Digest}, III, (March 4, 1931), pp. 4–8, 17.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Galveston Wharf Company Dedicates Elevator "B"}, cover.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 2.
various steps. CN08159 "shows the central aisle of the workroom and gives an idea of the massive structural form required to carry the whole building."\(^{53}\) CN08155 appeared on page five of the program—"[e]leven sets of scales, each with a capacity of twenty-five [sic] hundred bushels of grain, are located in the scale room of the elevator and shown in the picture herewith."\(^{54}\) "Equipment Protects Grain From All Damage" was the headline for CN08157, with the caption explaining that "[t]his picture illustrates the massiveness of the construction which was required."\(^{55}\) "Interior of one section of the shipping gallery was the caption for CN08156, with the headline, "Mechanical Equipment Perfectly Co-ordinated" attached.\(^{56}\) One of the photographs discussed here, CN08158, was not used in the program but appears as part of this negative series in the Verkin collection holdings of the Center for American History in Austin, Texas.

These interior images are first of all straightforward documentation of a newly constructed industrial grain handling facility. Like the view of the port discussed above, and as several of the captions indicate, the Wharf Company, sponsor and producer of the program, wanted to impress upon readers (and viewers) the immensity of the project, the "massiveness" of the buildings, and the quantities of grain that could be processed, no doubt implying comparable returns in profits, jobs, efficiency, and port traffic. For a client, the port could point to the most modern and efficient of facilities and an extensive range of services. For the community criticizing the Wharf Company for not meeting the challenge of competition, the business could point to the grain elevator as an expensive investment designed to remedy that failing. And the photographs are successful in


\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*, p. 6, both quotations.

\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*, p. 9, both quotations.
conveying their message. The spaces are cavernous, receding far into the distance and marked at regular intervals by vaulting concrete columns, grain chutes, or ropes that disappear into darkened ceilings. The few objects that interfere with the visual progression in CN08159—grilled floor openings, a single diagonal chute—serve merely to reinforce the vastness of the space and suggest other equally large adjacent areas.

“All Inbound and Outbound Grain is Weighed,” reads the headline over CN08155, and a viewer’s eyes roll over the large, round scale valve in the lower left corner across the “FAIRBANKS” sign to other valves and signs in seemingly limitless regression to a wall that is almost out of sight.57 The strength and complexity of the object’s basic form—a column bounded by a strong vertical structure, decreasing to a funnel shape above the circular valve—impresses the viewer with the importance of the machine and its process. That a series of these machines are linked, physically and visually, by a brightly lit horizontal bar that moves from unit to unit, merely reinforces the immensity of the whole operation. There may be smaller objects connected to the scales and involved in their use, but the exact symmetry of these various canisters or attachments and the regularity of their distribution along the wall serves to suggest that the operator of this elevator, capable of regimenting such machinery, is a mighty force indeed.

The “perfectly co-ordinated” mechanical equipment is further demonstrated in CN08156, with the symmetrical conveyor belts, walls, metal superstructure, and lighting converging to a point out of sight in the center of the photograph.58 The photographer lit the scene dramatically, using a darkened foreground to assure focus on the lit subject in the center. The light, like the structure itself, moves at regular intervals through the space,

57 _Ibid._, p. 5.

58 This image was also used in an advertisement for Diamond Rubber Belting Company published in the _Shippers Digest_, III, (March 4, 1931), advertising section.
marking the passage in order to emphasize the length of the room and the machinery that progresses through the passageway. The roof trusses and the stanchions supporting the conveyor belts march regularly the full distance from foreground to the implied horizon, drawing the viewer’s eye ever backward. The wall infrastructure of girders is diagonal, connecting at the top and bottom and moving out of sight as well. These half-diamond, triangular shapes are echoed in the diamonds created by the roof supports, a clever, easily unnoticed feature of the Diamond Rubber Belting Company advertisement.

The apparent absence of human beings reinforces the notion that the Wharf Company wanted to stress the port’s physical plant, believing that the size of the elevators, the capacity of the facility, the sheer amount of grain that could be handled, would be the most important and motivating information for a potential client. The image CN08159 is titled “Careful Supervision Given Grain Handling,” but there are no figures present in the picture.\(^59\) Despite the “trained people” mentioned in the program text, workers are not really a factor. There are no images in the dedication program that take the elevator’s personnel as subjects. Men operating the equipment and managing the elevator are not perceived to be important—or at least not as important as the structure and its machinery. There are at least two figures present in CN08157. Titled “Equipment Protects Grain From All Damage,” the caption of the picture explains that “the arrangement of conveyors and spouts is such that no single operation interferes with any other.” What is first striking about the title is that it is the machinery that is lauded for its service in protecting the product. It is the prevention of interference, it seems, that keeps the grain from being damaged, not any service rendered by any workers, two of whom have been captured in this view. There is apparently no need for or positive action supplied by human assistance. The workers in this view are in the far background, almost hidden by concrete columns. They have not completely hidden themselves, nor do they

\(^{59}\) Galveston Wharf Company Dedicates Elevator “B”, p. 4.
appear to be intentionally positioning themselves within camera range. They are in the periphery, observing the photographer. A broom propped against a column suggests a human presence, but its owner is not to be seen. Had the worker been asked to vacate the view? This picture works like the others in its focus on the physical and mechanical aspects of grain handling, with strong square forms, fluid conveyor belts, and regular components of the elevator's structure implying size and depth. But the inclusion of human figures and their obvious devaluation dehumanizes the process. Workers, if they are present at all, are apparently interchangeable and not worth notice or comment. No individuals are singled out; no groups of managers are introduced; no staff is described. Within the seventeen-page program created for the opening of this facility, mention of staffing or operators is noticeable for its absence. Apart from two claims about the "direction of trained men," and "assuring safety . . . to the operating crews," all of the equipment shown and described appears to run by magic—or by other machinery. After spending the first ten pages detailing the operation of the elevator and its zenith of modernity and efficiency, the remaining six pages are devoted to recounting its construction. Each step is covered, each contractor—companies, not individuals—acknowledged. When personnel are discussed at all, the issue is presented as a Wharf Company benefit to the community: "It is not amiss to mention that from 85 to 90 per cent of the men employed on the new elevator were residents of Galveston." The beneficent company was providing economic largesse to the area population. As evidenced by the program text and the images selected, the Wharf Company did not consider staffing a major factor in its grain operations. The Wharf Company, by choosing to use these photographs, reveals its own attitude toward its workers. This huge new industrial

60 Ibid., p. 2.

61 Ibid., p. 17.
edifice—Elevator “B”—is the unquestionable sole subject of these images.

Viewed decades later, the photographs of the elevator are haunting. Unlike more modern advertising materials, these are not so-called action shots; images from the program are static, suggesting potential rather than actual activity. Perhaps they were taken this way to encourage customers to take advantage of the pristine facility, to fill the void, to create the activity. In this way, they also mark the evolution of commercial photography, how the kinds of images that were viewed as effective marketing tools have changed over time. Specifically, informed viewers may realize that Houston did surpass Galveston in waterborne commerce and that the elevator represented a last gasp effort to forestall defeat. Less particular to the historical context, the images may also suggest more contemporary, late-twentieth-century attitudes toward industrialization, big business, and competition. One of the images—CN08158—not used in the program but part of the negative series, has long ropes with looped ends that figure prominently in the center of the frame. The similarity of these ropes to nooses may not be lost on an imaginative audience. Possible implications that may be overlaid upon these photographs—spiritual emptiness matching structural emptiness, dehumanized work, strangling of individuality and independence—fall within a conventional critique of industrialization and modernity.

Another of the Verkin images considered here was used in a similar way to the grain elevator views. The photograph V-2981 is a picture of a new United Fruit Company banana handling facility opened in 1938 and located on Pier 19. A companion negative from this series appeared on the cover of what appears to be another dedication program announcing “the most modern and efficient Banana Handling Plant in America.”


63 This image is a single sheet included by itself in a folder. The complete program is not
Galveston had a long history of banana commerce. After stopping shipments in 1900, the Nicaraguan Steamship Company resumed importation of the fruit in 1901. When the United Fruit Company opened an office in Galveston, shipments increased, with an annual traffic of 25,000,000 bunches from Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Panama. The fruit entered Galveston and was shipped as far away as San Francisco and Nome, Alaska. Electric conveyors took six to eight hours to off-load 25,000 bunches from ships to railroad cars.

The new banana dock covered 13,650 square feet with a ceiling height of 17 feet. The bulk of the banana handling process occurred out of doors, and the interior view of this new structure is actually the inside of a wall-less, roofed shed. Like the image of the long, receding conveyor belts of the grain elevator, this picture was taken from the center of an aisle between equally stretching banana conveyances. While the table-like equipment also includes a strong horizontal surface in the foreground of the image, the eyes travel back to a point of convergence somewhere in the distance, unseen within the structure. Because of the openness of the building, no walls visually confine the subject. There might be banana equipment extending infinitely to the back and on either side. Again, the sense is of immense capacity and limitless potential. The structure holds no bananas in the view, and without captioning, the function of the space might be difficult to determine. No workers are present; the bananas, like the grain, are apparently capable of moving themselves through the process.

64 Galveston Tribune, December 25, 1901.

65 Rex Dunbar Frazier, "Galveston," Pan American Magazine, (August, 1913), 67; Galveston Daily News, March 8, 1903; April 23, 1913; for mechanics of banana importation, see Shippers Digest, October 30, 1929, pp. 3–4, 11.

66 "Covered Wharves of Galveston Wharf Company," in Port Book, p. 31. While there is no publication date in the front matter, information in the text suggests that the book was published in 1932.
Another commodity is also the subject of this vast, expansive kind of representation. Far more than grain or bananas, Galveston’s largest cargo had always been cotton. Since 1852, the Wharf Company claimed, cotton growers of the region had been shipping their crop out of Texas through Galveston to American and European ports. 67 For the season 1903–1904 the port ranked first in the country in cotton and wheat exports and by 1905–1906, first in the world. That same period (1905–1906) Galveston ranked second in the country, after New York, in exports. 68 V-1974, an image of a cotton shed interior, utilizes the same kind of expansive representation as the banana facility and the grain elevator but adds a human component as well. This warehouse is not empty but filled with bales of cotton. Like its predecessor photographs, the view recedes to infinity with no visible walls or enclosure. Supporting posts march symmetrically to the rear, while parallel ceiling joists add to the perspectival emphasis. Unlike the views discussed earlier, this image is peopled by businessmen somehow affiliated with the warehouse. Most are not likely workmen—their clothing suggests the office, not the docks, and they are not traditionally arranged in a group in the forefront. All are white, also suggesting management or supervisory assignments of some kind. They lounge on the bales or lean against posts throughout the picture. Far from being captured in an awkwardly arranged group, these individuals appear to be supremely confident and relaxed in their domain. They stand or rest on top of the cotton, fully in charge and in control of the commodity. Finding all of them in the picture is almost a game between photographer and viewer. One publication using this photograph was a souvenir booklet produced by the Galveston News and distributed to the Associated

67 Port Book, p. 46.

68 Galveston Daily News, September 1, 1904 (for 1903–1904 ranking); September 1, 1906 (for 1905–1906 rankings).
Advertising Clubs of America who met in Galveston in 1912.\textsuperscript{69} It is captioned, "Cotton Stored in One of Galveston's Mammoth Wharf Sheds." That period was outstanding for the port—in addition to maintaining its dominance in cotton, Galveston ranked third nationally in combined foreign commerce in 1910–1911.\textsuperscript{70} The figures in the shed seemed to feel justified in their arrogance. The immensity of the shed is conveyed and the figures provide both scale and a sense of mastery.

The remaining images discussed here have not yet been found in any extant published sources. They are all negatives contained in the Verkin archive at Peabody Essex Museum and are listed on the index to that collection. While they may carry little contextual freight since they cannot be analyzed or interpreted as parts of a larger printed or textual whole, they are still valuable for their content, visual quality, and the insight that they provide into port operations. In some cases, they may be parts of a longer series of multiple negatives taken for commercial or documentary purposes.

Verkin image 2913 has no index entry in the Peabody Essex Museum catalogue, probably because it contains no ships.\textsuperscript{71} Likely taken as part of the grain elevator series, the image is a masterful composition of strong industrial forms. A huge block of grain silos—five wide and and an unknown number long—command a viewer's initial attention. At the base, grounding the image by its strong horizontal orientation and jaunty angle, is a Galveston Wharf Company locomotive, No. 101, and its attendant cars, emerging from between the bank of silos and some kind of building on the right. The

\textsuperscript{69} "Souvenir of Galveston Issued by the Galveston News complimentary to the Associated Advertising Clubs of America, May 26, 1912," Folder 3, Galveston Wharf Company Manuscript collection, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, September 1, 1911.

\textsuperscript{71} Verkin Collection index, Peabody Essex Museum, unpublished, copy in possession of author, p. 127.
image almost explodes out of the frame. The silos vault skyward; the engine seems ready to run out of the lower left of the picture. The bright, high contrast lighting makes the locomotive and white silos vivid in the brilliant daylight. But the human figures make the picture live. Two railroad workers give life and energy to what is already a powerful formal representation. The engineer, leaning out of his cabin, views the track ahead in a traditional engineer pose, complete with hat and perhaps poised to blow the whistle. His stance is part of railroading’s visual language, familiar from children’s books, cartoons, and textbooks. His partner’s position, standing on the top of the first railcar, is both highly functional and immensely evocative. Most likely, the man standing on the railcar is signalling to someone further down the train. His arms are held in a way that may sometimes indicate width and the ability to pass through a given space. A more imaginative interpretation would suggest expansiveness and joy, or possibly the conducting of this industrial symphony. These two human figures, so small in scale to their surroundings, add activity, energy, and emotion to an otherwise intimidating industrial landscape.

There may be a great deal of emotion found in this image. If this negative was taken as part of the Elevater “B” series—as seems highly plausible—this location and these workers were participating in the creation and operation of a massive new industrial facility that carried with it a heavy burden of community and corporate hope. This new elevator was to improve the port’s competitive position by offering greater capacity and more modern handling, add jobs, and reassert Galveston’s commercial primacy. Moreover, the nature of this enterprise, with its vaulting silos, immense machinery, and huge spaces evidenced a belief in sheer size and industrial capacity. “If we just build it big enough, “ the organizers seemed to say, “we’ll be the best.” This kind of blind faith in the ability of properly constructed bits of steel, bricks, and mortar to guarantee community and corporate success runs throughout the American narrative of
urban and industrial development. This single image is uniquely successful in conveying both the raw strength of industry and the fragility of human hope placed in it.

Individual ships play a primary role in the remaining Verkin images considered. Catalogued only by the name of the ship and with no mention of a human figure, V-2121 is a striking portrait of an unidentified businessman and the Moss Point. The ship is known to have been built in 1919 in Moss Point, Mississippi, and was owned by the Western Marine and Salvage Company in the years 1923–1924.\textsuperscript{72} Galveston promoted its ship service facilities, and the vessel may have been in for repairs.

The vessel is photographed in drydock. What (or who) is the subject of the view is unclear. The man is centered in the foreground of the frame, looking directly at the photographer. Many specific aspects of the image direct attention to the figure: he stands at the bow of the ship, the planking on the hull of the vessel curves toward the bow, the sharp edge of the prow leads the eye downward; the anchor chains emerge from hawsepipes and pool symmetrically beside him; the tall sides of the drydock visually frame the scene. Even the forward section of the drydock, a triangular section whose point is centered at the bottom of the frame, sends the eye back up the walkway toward the figure. The man stands fearlessly with his back turned to the immense object behind him, implying either complete control or indifference. He wears business attire, obviously a man of some status and not a workman on the vessel. But what of the ship itself? It fills the drydock as well as the photograph. It is huge, towering over the smaller figure, almost protective, clearly tamed. The eye first registers its massive shape, before realizing that there is a figure at all.

Besides ambiguously portraying man or ship, the image is noteworthy for its strong geometry. A wide variety of horizontal lines generally in the floor of the drydock, and varying in length and width, flow backward from the strong and thick triangularity of

\textsuperscript{72} 
Ibid., p. 105.
the forward drydock. The thinner flooring inside the triangle becomes the heavier
flooring of the dock and firmly grounds the image. Other lines contained in the walls and
top of the drydock are dark and evenly spaced, rigidly defining the photograph’s
perspective. The ship itself is planked, not of riveted or welded plates, and the rhythmic
horizontal lines of the hull planks, albeit curved, add to the range of linear representation.
The only true curves in the image are the closed circles of the portholes and anchor
hawsepipes. Curves are suggested in the machinery at the base of the drydock’s sides and
the lines running from ship to dock, but the forms in the image are primarily—and
strongly—linear and angular. This dominance of strong lines adds to the power of the
picture.

For all the space implied by the small size of the figure, the image is surprisingly
closed, the walls of the drydock confining its contents. The lines from the ship to the
dock tie the sides of the photograph to the sides of the ship, containing vessel and viewer
within the frame. The photograph is a vertical view, and its angle—intentionally centered,
looking slightly down at the figure, but significantly up at the ship—makes the Moss
Point confront and loom over the viewer, again suggesting restriction. This combination
of features—the ambiguity of the subject, the strong geometry, and the tension between
expansiveness and contraction—makes the picture both a striking visual statement of
industrial power and an intriguing composition of line and shape.

Other drydock images exist that document the kind of ship services available in
the port. V-2836 shows a ship out of the water and comparably docked. There is no
specific archival entry for this vessel, but the surrounding negatives are described as
being of the R. P. Smith, "bow only, showing damage." Negatives of other damaged
craft, probably taken for documentary reasons, are also in the collection. The vessel in the
picture may well have bow damage; scaffolding and removed hull plating near the area

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73 Verkin Collection Index, p. 127.
suggest that possibility. Like the image of the Moss Point, this photograph has a strong horizontal orientation. The floor of the drydock and the addition of a catwalk in front of the ship function to ground the composition. The converging walls of the drydock direct the eye toward the center of the picture and the positioned ship. But where the Moss Point image was a confining one, the R. P. Smith is more open and expansive. First of all, the picture is a horizontal view, the drydock floor and catwalk working with the orientation of the image to convey a sense of breadth. A small area outside of the drydock may be glimpsed to the right, suggesting a space outside the dock itself. The drydock sides spread widely, opening rather than closing, with the catwalk appearing to hold them in place if not stretch them further. There is more activity on the periphery with a large, square object suspended by a crane that is out of view on the left and with differently shaped and sized objects lining the upper edge of the drydock. The ship is the focus of this view, centered and obviously tended by all of the surrounding equipment. There are no figures easily seen in the image, and the hull nestles securely within the repair facility. While less striking in appearance than the Moss Point photograph, this image is a more traditional kind of promotional or documentary view.

Just as V-2121 was notable for its strong horizontal lines, V-2260 is exceptional for its myriad curves. This image of the Paul Revere is the most recently built vessel discussed here. Constructed in 1942 in Los Angeles, California, the ship was operated by the U. S. War Shipping Administration. Surprisingly sensuous, the photograph acquires a blurred, diffuse quality when printed and appears to have been inexpertly exposed in the upper right corner. The wonderful amalgam of curves emphasized by the physical attributes of the ship is reinforced by the setting and photographic technique.

First of all, the ship is empty, with far more of its hull out of the water than would be usual. The waterline—the line where black meets gray near the number “28” divides

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74 Ibid., p. 113.
what is above and below the water when the ship is loaded—is far above the actual level of the channel. Because so much of the ship is out of the water, the sides of the hull that rise vertically from the calm, flat water, and curve upward and outward to the sheer line are much longer, making the curve far longer. The sheer line, the upper edge of the black topside where it meets the rail, is perpendicular to the line of the hull that rises from the water, and it moves away from the bow, then sweeps aft. The sharp line of the bow is extended by the pole on the foredeck and creates a kind of stake, a strong vertical line out of which the hull shape seems to flow. The multi-colored topsides contribute to the sinuous appearance, creating additional horizontal arcs that parallel the sheer, following the lines of the hull as it moves inward at the bow, outward around the hold, and inward again toward the stern. Vertical interest is supplied by the numbers marking the ship’s depth in the water that are painted perpendicular to the water’s surface. They too follow the shape of the hull and convey the second, vertical kind of curvature found in ship construction. Individuals familiar with watercraft know that straight lines are rarely seen afloat and the unusual amount of hull visible above the water affords the viewer an opportunity to see much more of the ship’s shape.

Lighting in this photograph further accentuates the hull’s variety. The brightness of highlights on the forward, upper bow section makes the darker curve of the midsection more noticeable. Another, lighter area aft indicates the turn of the hull toward the stern. The general atmospheric brightness keeps the eye focused on the darkness of the ship itself. The tone of the railing is evenly matched to the color of the ship where it does enter the water and serves to define the hull area and its variety of shape.

Finally, the curves of the ship’s hull are even more clearly contrasted with the linear nature of the surrounding objects. The pier and dock to the right are straight, horizontal and receding with equally upright straight supporting pilings. Another ship superstructure that may be seen above and behind the dock is a pale, faint collection of
light and dark horizontal areas. Other ships down the channel on the left are too far distant to distinguish any subtlety of hull shape, and they appear as straight lines relative to the curving shape of the *Paul Revere*. Even the lines holding the *Revere* to the pier are pulled taut with no catenary.

The Verkin Studio was frequently commissioned to provide visual images for various Wharf Company projects. That these photographs were contracted for in the first place suggests the company’s belief in the efficacy of visual images to persuade employees, clients, community leaders, and critics. What specific views were selected offers even greater insight into Wharf Company attitudes toward those constituencies. In executing these work orders, the studio created a body of maritime imagery, cultural artifacts open to complex historical analysis.

The culture that these photographs illuminate was a complicated construction of public and private, individual and community, legal, social, and economic factors whose interaction changed dramatically over time. When George Sealy, president of the Galveston Wharf Company, addressed the Rotary Club in 1928, he stressed the inseparability of Galveston and its waterfront. “Thousands of anchor chains bind these wharves to your shore,” he intoned, “they cannot leave or desert[sic] you whether times are good or bad, they are here for all time to come, they have served you well and honestly and will prosper only as does this island to which they are bound.”

The relationship had always been a rocky one, contested in board room and court room alike, but each was essential to the other and their attachment inevitable.

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Chapter Three:
"Always Available for Work, at Moderate Rates of Wages": Workers on the Waterfront

Galveston was founded as a seaport, and well into the twentieth century the island city lived up to its reputation as a center of waterborne commerce. For a variety of reasons the island never developed a major manufacturing sector, and inhabitants perceived the city as primarily a maritime center. The Galveston Wharf Company ruled the piers with an iron hand, and the city's economic well-being was inextricably tied to the port's success. Monies paid to those directly employed by the port and its clients—longshoremen, stevedores, and cotton screwmen, for example—were essential to the health of Galveston businesses. And others engaged in the port's commercial activities—shipping agents, wholesalers, commission merchants, insurers, bankers—were equally dependent upon cargos moving across the island's piers. Besides these obvious beneficiaries, many other individuals and enterprises were economically connected to the port. Fishermen and oystermen brought their catches to sell to packers, restaurants, and the general public; farmers from the mainland sent produce to market; local hotels catered to arriving and departing passengers. Far fewer in number, but equally attached to the waterfront, were the officers and ships' crews that visited Galveston during a voyage. The Verkin Studio, as a frequent photographer for the Galveston Wharf Company, captured much of this activity on film, revealing not only some of the more technical aspects of waterfront work but also the diversity of individuals connected to maritime trades. In addition, New Orleans photographer Achille Simon produced a small, haunting collection of seaman portraits in the late 1920s that recorded, in a particularly evocative way, some of the men that moved through that Gulf port.

Galveston was always primarily a port of export; crops produced in the rich, albeit sparsely populated interior of the state moved across the wharves to national and international markets, and cotton was by far the most important commodity handled in the
port for many years. By 1833 more than thirty cotton gins were operating in Texas, and by 1845 cotton was second only to foodstuffs as the state's major crop.\(^1\) Cotton moved by wagon or oxcart from widely scattered farms to Galveston, frequently collecting at distribution points such as Houston for transport by rail or water to the island port, where the bulky commodity was compressed into more compact bales and loaded aboard ships. Already an increasingly important cotton port prior to the Civil War, Galveston was challenging New Orleans in cotton exports by 1900. Even after the devastating storm in September 1900, the port ranked second nationally in cotton and first in cottonseed exports for that year.\(^2\) By 1903–1904, Galveston was the nation's leading exporter of cotton and wheat; in 1905 the port ranked first in world cotton exports and was second only to New York in total value of exports. As late as 1910–1911, Galveston was ranked third nationally in combined foreign commerce.\(^3\)

In 1913 Galveston was designated supply port by the U.S. War department, which meant an increase in traffic and a growing number of naval vessels. Dislocations caused by the First World War also increased the volume of goods leaving Galveston, and the port prospered during the war years. After the war, however, port activity lessened, and Galveston began a slow downward drift that continues to this day. Houston opened its deepwater channel during this period, and ports in Texas City, Beaumont, and Port Arthur deepened their harbors and expanded as well. These factors


\(^2\) Thomas Truel Barker, "Partners in Progress: The Galveston Wharf Company and the City of Galveston, 1900–1930," (dissertation, Texas A&M University, 1979); hereafter, "Partners in Progress."

\(^3\) Barker, "Partners in Progress," pp. 77–78; for cotton and wheat exports, see Galveston Daily News, September 1, 1904; for 1905 rankings, see *ibid.*, September 1, 1906; for 1910–1911, see *ibid.*, September 1, 1911.
combined with organizational and financial characteristics of the Galveston Wharf Company and changes in export products and markets to depress the Galveston port. Nevertheless, during the early part of this century and well into the 1940s, the port was the island's major economic actor, and its activities provided employment and income for thousands of island residents.  

Documenting the exact number of workers on the Galveston waterfront is difficult. As a percentage of labor in the United States, employment in waterfront-based industries and activity was dwarfed (first) by agriculture and (later) manufacturing. Whereas some effort was made in the early censuses of the twentieth century to distinguish waterfront occupations, those workers engaged in general labor on a pier or wharf are only infrequently counted separately from other general laborers. Most often, longshoremen, stevedores, or other manual dockworkers were included in the "labor, n.o.s." (not specified) category. Nevertheless, some information about waterfront employment emerges from the 1900–1940 census reports. In 1900 Galveston had 29,965 persons aged ten years or older living within its city limits. Of these individuals, 15,875, or 52.9 percent, were classified as being engaged in "occupations." 5 Early tables in this census break down occupational categories, placing "boatmen and sailors" within the "Trade and Transportation division"; likewise "Longshoremen and stevedores" are a subset of "Laborers," and "Fishermen and Oystermen" are included in the "Fishing and mining" category. 6 In the subsequent table

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4 The best account of the Galveston Wharf Company during this period is Barker's "Partners in Progress." This unpublished dissertation contains tables detailing imports and exports by commodity, and traces the rise and fall of the company's fortunes prior to 1940.


of "Total Persons 10 Years of Age and Over Engaged in Each Specified Occupation, Classified by Sex, for Cities Having 25,000 Inhabitants or More," however, a more general occupation listing is used, with the identifiable waterfront trades subsumed under broader headings. Adding the total numbers of "laborers, not specified (2,860); boatmen and sailors (240); and fishermen and oystermen (76)" results in a total of 3,176, or 20 percent of the total occupational force in Galveston, Texas, at this time. Understanding that not all unspecified laborers would necessarily be longshoremen or stevedores, a significant number were probably included in this total, as evidenced by the more specific information found in the 1910 census.

The 1910 census did distinguish among the different kinds of laborers, and a clearer picture of the number of men employed on the waterfront emerges. In this enumeration, a separate category, "Water transportation (selected occupations)" was included in the "Transportation" classification. According to this census, Galveston had a total population ten years of age or older of 30,525 people. (The city rebounded from the catastrophic hurricane of 1900 by holding its own, population-wise.) Of these 30,525 people, 18,192, or 59.6 percent, had "occupations," and 13,641 of these people were men. Combining the numbers for water transportation (2,142) and fishermen and oystermen (87) results in a total of 2,229 men. (According to the figures, no women were employed in these areas.) In 1910, then, approximately 16.3 percent of the working men on the island worked in some capacity on the wharves. 7

The 1920 compilation is the least useful of these early counts. Far less interested in the variety of occupations, this census's population statistics place more emphasis on

7 Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910. Vol. IV, Population Schedule, Table IV (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), pp. 232, 234, 236. The category "Water transportation (selected occupations)" (2142) was further divided into "Boatmen, canalmen, and lock keepers" (9) "Captains, masters, mates, and pilots" (115); "Longshoremen and stevedores" (1716); and "Sailors and Deck hands" (302).
the race, gender, nativity, and parentage of workers than the actual nature of their work. Given the rise of other ports and the beginning of decline for the Galveston enterprise, it is perilous at best to try to accurately extrapolate the percentage of waterfront workers. Moreover, numbers provided are for Galveston County, not simply the city, and take into account a growing mainland population. What may be said, however, is that statewide, there were 3,601 longshoremen and stevedores and 778 individuals employed in ship and boat building. The fishermen and oystermen have disappeared, perhaps included in "Other food industries." No doubt more than a few dockworkers may be found among "Foremen and overseers (other transportation industries)" or "Laborers: Other transportation industries," but attempting to draw conclusions from the available data would be irresponsible. Suffice to say that Texas was developing at least a small cadre of waterfront workers.  

Figures for 1930 are again compiled by county but are somewhat more suggestive of the role of the port in employment. "All Gainful Workers" in Galveston County numbered 30,866. Of these, 23,445 were male (76 percent) and 7,421 (24 percent) were female. The occupation categories continued to be broad, but examining the statistics for the county suggests where dockworkers may be silently enumerated. Galveston County claims 6,346 "[o]ther transportation and communication" workers, the largest number in any single category. (The specified areas are streets, automobile services, steam and street railroads, telegraph and telephone.) "Forestry and fishing" accounts for another 323.  

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Better figures are available for 1940, the later part of the period considered here. Numbers are again provided for the city of Galveston, and more detailed occupational categories are used. Of Galveston's total population of 60,862 residents (30,424 men, 30,438 women), 29,379 (20,839 men, 8,540 women), or 48.3 percent, are listed as "in the labor force." (For the first time, the census distinguishes between population over a certain age [fifteen] and those specifically working or looking for work.) By the process of elimination, certain of the occupation descriptions seem to indicate dockworkers. Both railroad- and automobile-related employment have their own classifications. Therefore, "other transportation," with a large number (3,549) of male workers, and "[l]aborers, except farm," with a total of 3,860 men would seem to be the logical divisions for port workers. If we assume that as few as half of these men work in water-related industries, then 17.8 percent of them depend on the port for income. 10

The census numbers discussed above are proffered cautiously, given the variations that exist among the enumerations. But the percentages calculated from them are exceedingly conservative, utilizing total numbers of workers that may be directly connected to port-related employment. What is left completely unconsidered are the numerous wholesalers, shipping agents, cotton factors, commission merchants, and other white-collar individuals dependent on port commerce for their livelihoods as well. If the economic fortunes of between 15 and 20 percent of male workers on the island were directly tied to the prosperity of the wharves, thousands of others—technically employed in supporting or complementary roles—were probably no less dependent on the Wharf Company. Conservative calculations notwithstanding, the port was the economic focal point of the island during this period.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Wharf Company was trying to survive in a highly competitive market in the period after 1915 and began to promote itself more aggressively. Photographs of ships being worked along the piers were frequently included in promotional materials, and sometimes images of workers engaged in particular industries were also incorporated. Of the nineteen pictures produced by the Verkin Studio reviewed in this chapter, seven (V-3173-1, V-3173-2, V-3172-3, V-3173-4, V-2458, V-1469, and V-2785) show various goods, especially cotton, being loaded onboard ship and into holds. Two photographs (V-2777, V-1984) are close-up views of cargo areas. A single image suggests the work of ship maintenance (V-2971), while the remaining views document various shoreside activities involving fishing (V-2482-8-B, V-2903, V-2904), ship repair (V-2936, V-1530), the processing of imports and exports (V-2843), administration (V-2929), and wharf construction (V-2822, 2786). The images discussed below, perhaps more than those in other chapters, were selected for documentary purposes, to record important kinds of cargos, to describe how some workers performed their tasks, and to suggest the variety of employment that might be found on the waterfront.

Taking pictures of workers was not a new venture for the Wharf Company or business in general. Workers in the 1850s and 1860s paid for daguerreotype and ambrotype portraits of themselves that included tools, uniforms, and special equipment indicative of particular trades or professions. By the 1880s new kinds of worker images, taken by employers and primarily for public relations or instructional purposes, supplanted personal portraiture.¹¹ Large firms, newly organized along modern, corporate

¹¹Richard Oestreicher argues that photographic technology was so successful because it was both part of and responsive to the larger process of industrialization. Images of workers changed as the nature of work changed, and photographs from the period 1840–1920 testify to that transformation. Richard Oestreicher, "From Artisan to Consumer: Images of Workers 1840–1920," Journal of American Culture, 4 (Spring, 1981), pp. 47–64.
V-1984
V-1530
lines, began to develop extensive archives and to employ photographers. The images generated "were used to document capital improvements, to illustrate catalogues of industrial equipment, and ultimately to intervene in the labour process... The image served as a convenient empirical substitute for the object, as evidence, as demonstration, as model."\textsuperscript{12} Photography played an integral role, for example, in what was called "scientific management." Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, pioneers in the effort to increase industrial efficiency through motion study, developed elaborate equipment for photographing factory workers on production lines. Using both still and motion photographic technology, they attached tiny lights to the workers' bodies, hands, and arms and recorded laborers' movements on the job. In 1916 the couple announced the existence of seventeen "basic movements which were taken to be constitutive of all human productive activity." The Gilbreths called these movements "therbligs" (Gilbreth spelled backwards), and analyzed their photographs in order to formulate the most efficient and least wasteful ways to complete assigned tasks.\textsuperscript{13} Far more frequently, photographs produced by businesses were used in annual reports, sales materials, and promotional pieces.

The Verkin images considered here were used in a variety of ways, many of them in multiple publications. The ship loading series (V-3173, 1-4) documents the youngest of the vessels covered in this dissertation. The \textit{Noto Maru} was a Japanese steamship built in 1945 at Osaka, Japan. These pictures record the vessel's loading of cotton at the port


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 246–49. Sekula also discusses the role of photography in the larger bid to integrate and mollify workers into an industrialized system of production. As discussed in the previous chapter, employee magazines were a major feature of this effort.
and were taken sometime before Verkin's retirement in 1953. The images move sequentially from bow to stern and record a great deal of information about the process. The superstructure and cargo handling equipment of the vessel is apparent, and the mechanics of cotton loading are illustrated. Gilbert Mers, a retired Corpus Christi, Texas, longshoreman, IWW member, and cotton handler, remembers that "[various] ports had their various cargo specialties. In our area it was cotton." Loading cotton was lucrative, but very hard work. It involved transporting the compressed bales of the fiber from the pier to the ship and then stowing them tightly in one of several holds or hatches of a ship. Bales were carried on handtrucks and made into three-bale loads to be hoisted on deck. From there, men in the gang "would hang their hooks in the front bale, roll it to the work and have it properly stowed" by the time the next man arrived with the second bale of the load. Those three would secure the second bale while a fourth man arrived with the third bale. Then the men returned to the deck to begin the process again with the next three bales. Mers went on to describe the finer points of cotton handling:

The only tool[s] required were a cotton hook . . . [and] a "handleather" to protect the back of the hand from buckles, rivets, and the sometimes exposed ends of the metal bands that held the bales to the size to which they'd been pressed. . . . The square bale measured a rough two by two by five feet. . . . The cotton hook had a shape all its own, differing from the more familiar box hook or hay hook. It was used backhanded. . . . You learned what was meant by expressions such as "cut," "come under," "set you," "set me," "pull for me," all having to do with aiming the bale toward the work in handiest fashion. "Home on the roll" or "on your knees" had to do with putting your bale snug against the bales already stowed. . . . It didn't take long to find out that the basic secret in handling cotton was to keep your bale moving until it was stowed. Keep it "live," because starting and restarting a motionless bale was a drain on strength and energy. The idea was to learn the moves and make 'em, keeping that bale alive and moving into its proper
A cotton gang was traditionally composed of fifteen men hired from the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) hiring hall. "At the specified hiring time each gang foreman whose name was on the board (ordered for a job) would pull out his book ... and begin to hire his gang. Then he asked you if you wanted to work, when you could answer yes or no as you chose. To ask the foreman for a job was a faux pas." When Mers began working on the docks there were two longshoremen's locals (union groups)—one composed of white men, one made up of blacks—and gangs would be either white or black. White and black gangs might work the same ship with the gangs dividing evenly the hatches to be worked. When Mers began working the docks in 1929, cotton no longer had to be "jammed" into place by men operating large screwjacks, a procedure illustrated in one of the Verkin images discussed below.

The series of Noto Maru photographs confirms Mers's description of the work. The ship has multiple hatches receiving three-bale loads of cotton. Two of the pictures (V-3172-2, V-3173-3) show a man maneuvering one of the cotton trucks into position and offloading a bale. Images like these were used in numerous commercial associations and port publications to reinforce Galveston's primacy as a Gulf cotton port.

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15 Ibid., p. 9.

16 Ibid., p. 11.

17 For examples of such use, see Port Book, pp. 36, 40, 42, 48; Galveston Commercial Association, The Port of Galveston: Handbook of Information on the Wharfage and Rail Terminal Facilities, Coal and Fuel Oil Bunkering Equipment, Dry Docks, Marine Railways and Repair Shops, With Complete Information on Port and Stevedoring Charges At the Port of Galveston, U.S.A. With Historical, Descriptive and Statistical Data on the Port's Commerce, (Galveston: Port of Galveston) 1918, 1922, 1925, 1928.
island port's reputation for cotton stowage, developed in the days when screwmen could increase a cotton cargo by 10 percent or more by "jamming" bales, was used by employers in other cities to set quotas for union contracts. 18

Cotton loading figures prominently in two other Verkin images (V-2458, V-1984). The more recent of them (V-2458) shows the loading of unidentified steamers along one of Galveston's wharves. This kind of image was very popular with the company, implying as it did, that an infinite number of ships lined an infinite length of pier to be filled with an unlimited amount of cotton. 19 The most forward vessel fills the front of the frame with a perfectly poised three-bale load moving off the staging toward the most forward hatch. From there, stretching backward to the horizon, other ships in the same position receive the same loads. The image is strongly perspectival, with the pier and a shadow cast by a nearby warehouse forming dark, thick bands that move from the front, center of the frame to a point out of sight on the horizon. The hulls of the ships parallel the pier and shadow; with the ships' superstructures, masts, and booms only reinforcing, like telephone poles that recede out of view, the immense stretch of pier. The stagings, adding a wonderful diagonal dynamic to the image, work as punctuation, again augmenting the impression of vast distance along the pier.

The final cotton image is perhaps the most important. Rich in information, V-1984 was one of two views of cotton jammers at work. A glass negative, this picture was undoubtedly taken before 1910, probably earlier, and documents a task and profession

18 Eric Arnesen. Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923. (New York: Oxford, 1991), pp. 196, 324n105. Dockworkers in New Orleans set a committee to investigate employers' claims and found them to be significantly inflated, but agents and stevedores insisted on increasing what was considered a days' stowage from 160 bales to 200 bales based on what they claimed to be Galveston's normal practice.

now extinct on the waterfront. Cotton in its natural state immediately after picking is low
density and uncompacted, a "fleecy" substance not unlike cotton balls. To transport the
substance profitably, it must be compressed into a smaller, more densely packed form.
Initially, cotton was moved in large canvas sacks holding 200 to 300 pounds. Suspended
under a hole in a platform, bags received the lint poured from above and men compressed
the cotton by tramping on the bag. After being sewn shut, the bag was dampened, and the
canvas, shrinking as it dried, would concentrate the cotton to a density of about five
pounds per cubic foot. \(^{20}\) By the mid-nineteenth century, screwpresses were developed
that could compress bales to a density of about eight pounds per cubic foot. Screwpresses
with metal components emerged after the Civil War, and the increased pressure that iron
or steel presses could generate produced bales similar to today's in size, weight, and
density. By the 1880s hydraulic presses were turning out "standard bales" that measured
56 inches by 31 inches by 22 inches and compressed the cotton to a density of 22 pounds
per cubic feet. \(^{21}\)

Ships that carried cotton gradually increased in size as hulls were increasingly
made of iron or steel rather than wood, and as steamships supplanted wooden sailing
vessels, voyage times decreased. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries both
the speed of shipment and amount of cargo rapidly increased. Ships that took months to
reach foreign ports and carried between 1,000 and 2,000 bales of cotton in the 1880s had
been replaced by vessels that could carry 20,000 bales and reach Europe in three
weeks. \(^{22}\)

The process for loading cotton into ships' holds did not change much over time


except for the practice of "jamming" the bales—using large jackscrews to compress the cotton even more compactly and wedge as many bales as possible into a ship. Cotton jamming was one of the elite jobs on the wharves and the men who did the work were called screwmen. They worked in five-man gangs, with one man serving as foreman. The foreman was called a "header" or "toter," was employed by the stevedoring firm, and hired the rest of the gang. Three or four gangs might be assigned to the hold of a ship. One gang got the bales on deck, while a second group rolled the bales to the hatch and sent them to the third gang that was stationed in the hold. If the hold was large, another gang would begin working at the opposite end stowing bales. Once enough cotton had been moved on deck or lowered into the hold, the other gangs joined their coworkers below and helped secure the cargo.  

A screwman's skill was needed to make sure as many bales as possible were crammed into any given space. Bales were placed on their sides, lengthwise, paralleling the ship's hull. Large jackscrews about three-and-a-half feet long and weighing almost 200 pounds were used to further compress cotton bales already placed in the hold so that more bales could be wedged in place. A foreman's ability was tested by figuring out how best to arrange the bales given the different and varying shape of a ship's hold. Layers of bales rose around the gangs, building up to the ceiling of the hold. If six feet remained along the top, bales were stowed upright, taking advantage of every inch of available space.  

Cotton screwing could increase a vessel's capacity by 10 percent or more. As a

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23 Ibid., p. 31. This description of cotton jamming is a very general summary of Taylor's elaborately detailed, comprehensive account of cotton screwing, compiled from documentary sources as well as extensive interviews with former longshoremen familiar with the process.

24 Ibid., pp. 32–39.

result, the men skilled in the trade were valuable members of the waterfront workforce. In
the early 1860s screwmen formed the Screwmen's Benevolent Association, largely as a
mutual benefit society, but conflicts over goals led to the group's dissolution. On
September 11, 1866, the association reorganized and over the course of the next
seventeen years tried to use its growing influence to affect wages, working conditions,
hours, and access to employment. By 1883 the union was powerful enough to strike for
higher wages and improved conditions. A black screwmen's union was started in
1870, and the two groups cooperated on occasion to better their collective positions on
the wharves. During the heyday of cotton jamming, with their services essential to the
economic success of shippers, the cotton screwmen were the most powerful labor unions
working the waterfront and were largely successful in protecting their members' interests.
Nevertheless, screwmen's unions were broken, but not by scabs or employer rigidity.
High-density cotton presses had been touted since 1900, but early models were expensive
and unreliable. As the technology was perfected, Galveston cotton interests improved
available port facilities and installed one of the new compresses. In 1910 a high-density
cotton press was installed at the port of Galveston, and tightly packed bales that were
produced by the new machinery rendered screwmen obsolete by 1914. One retired
longshoreman remembers the last vessel loaded by screwing leaving Galveston in
1929.

Southwestern Historical Quarterly, LXXV (October 1971), p. 159.

26 Taylor, pp. 46, 87–88; James V. Reese, "The Early History of Labor Organizations in

27 Reese, "Early History," p. 11. The interaction of the black and white unions and
efforts by employers to play one against the other are discussed in Reese, "Evolution of
an Early Texas Union," and Taylor, pp. 90–128, passim.

28 For the emergence of high-density compression and demise of cotton screwing, see
Cotton jamming, then, has significant historical importance to the port and to the labor history of the state, and the Verkin image both commemorates and informs. The image has immense technical value because it records the operation of equipment no longer used and rarely seen. How a jackscrew may be positioned to compress cotton bales is not self-evident, and the picture shows two gangs composed of four men and one foreman each securing bales at the top of a hold. The bales are arranged as described, and there are even bales stacked upright to fit against the hold's ceiling. A point of greater significance may be that the men in the picture are black, testifying to the presence of skilled black labor on the waterfront who are engaged in high-paying employment. In this photograph, members of the Longshoremen's Benevolent Association (the black counterpart to the Screwmen's Benevolent Association) work under black supervisors to complete loading.\(^\text{29}\)

The picture is a strong one, made interesting by featuring tools and a process unfamiliar to most viewers. In addition, the photograph depicts a procedure unique to the loading of cotton, a legendary commodity within island memory that still holds a special position in the hierarchy of cargos. The Galveston Wharf Company and the Galveston Commercial Association used this image many times. Ironically, surviving publications that include this picture have publishing dates beginning around 1915, past the time when cotton jamming was truly essential. As late as 1978 the Port of Galveston included the picture in its appointment calendar, a publication produced by the company and distributed to clients and supporters.\(^\text{30}\) The view has also been used in the exhibits of the

\(^{29}\) Race relations in Galveston and New Orleans varied somewhat from the southern norm because of each city's position as a seaport. For a variety of reasons best outlined in Eric Arnesen's book cited above, black workers were never completely shut out of dockwork, and instances of racial cooperation were not unknown.

\(^{30}\) For use of this image, see "Facts About the Galveston Wharf Company," pamphlet, Galveston Wharf Company Vertical Files, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, folder 3; Galveston Commercial Association, \textit{The Port of Galveston: Handbook of Information on the Wharfage and Rail Terminal Facilities. Coal and Fuel
Texas Seaport Museum and Rosenberg Library. 31

Other cargos besides cotton were loaded off Wharf Company piers, and the remaining Verkin ship-loading views (V-2785, V-1469, and V-2777) illustrate how different products were handled. Bagged goods, flour in this case, are being loaded in V-2785. The ship is the Salvation Lass, a steamship built at Hog Island, Pennsylvania, by the U.S. Shipping Board. Images like this one are included in port materials that describe how various cargos are handled in Galveston. Flour was a major export, arriving from the Texas Panhandle and the Midwest for shipment to Europe, Scandinavia, and Central and South America. If flour arrived from the mill before the ship assigned to carry it, the product would be stored in warehouses adjacent to the piers. When the flour was to be loaded, specially designed hand carts draped with canvas slings moved the bags shipside. From the foot of the staging, the sling was attached by cable to the ship's boom, hoisted on board, and lowered into the hatch for stowing. Most of the flour was packaged in 200 pound bags, although other packaging configurations of 140 pounds or cases of eight 25-pound units sometimes were loaded. 32

The port told clients that "[i]n the unloading and handling operations covering this important commodity, only highly trained crews are employed" and prided itself on being


31 From 1982 until 1991, the picture was used in exhibits installed in the hold of the 1877 Iron Barque Elissa, a restored sailing vessel and museum owned and operated by the Galveston Historical Foundation. Since 1991, the image has been included in main gallery space devoted to cotton handling at the Texas Seaport Museum. For the Rosenberg Library exhibits, see the Lykes gallery, third floor, Rosenberg Library.

32 "Careful Attention Given to Handling of Export Flour Is Feature of Port," Shippers Digest (September 26, 1928) p. 3.
"one of the few ports employing an official rat exterminator" (cats being unofficial, apparently), an "individual making the rounds of the warehouses daily . . . able to detect the existence of rats" and equipped to take "prompt and effective action." 33 Bagged cargo was transported by handcart and moved onboard across stagings much like cotton, but bags could break and were not packed as tightly as cotton bales. This again appears to be a black crew working, further evidence of their employment on the docks.

Another cargo-handling image considered (V-1469) helps a viewer understanding the interactive nature of ships and ports. The ship's cargo booms are being used to lift the last cartloads of goods on deck. A physics lesson on the water, a vessel's system of blocks, tackles, and booms was designed to facilitate the lifting and controlling of whatever was to be loaded. Ports varied in their facilities, and ships could not rely on the harbor to have necessary cargo handling equipment. Double and triple blocks eased the load for workers, and ships arrived with forests of masts and booms to load cargo as quickly and easily as possible. The ship in this image is the Genevieve Lykes, a steamship built in 1919 at Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and a frequent visitor to Galveston, Lykes Line operated two shipping companies out of its offices on the island, with vessels of the Lykes West Indies Line and the Lykes Line offering bi-weekly service to the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Lykes shared interests in other shipping lines as well and acted as agent for those lines. 34

The last cargo-oriented photograph (V-2777) is of an unidentified ship loading cartons of "Rex Holstein sausage" that bear admonitions to "stow away from the boilers." Labeling is also in Spanish, suggesting that the goods are bound for a foreign destination.

33 Port of Galveston pp. 47-48. Three images of bagged flour—one of warehouse storage and two of loading—appear in conjunction with the text.

Again, the picture is useful for recording the loading process; this gang is white and the cargo is stacked efficiently but with somewhat less attention to tightly packing the boxes.

Shipboard labor is the subject of V-2971. Noted in the index as only "unidentified steamer," the ship is a modern one with a riveted steel deck (rather than wood, for instance). A crew member is "swabbing" the deck, engaged in the kind of daily cleaning that keeps crews busy and ships "ship shape." Another man, perhaps an officer, watches from down the deck, probably curious as to what could possibly be photographically worthwhile about taking a picture of someone with a mop and pail. This particular image was included to suggest and represent the work of ships' crews, the ongoing schedule of regular maintenance necessary to keep a vessel running smoothly. Ships are far messier in port; dirt is, for the most part, a land-generated product that is less of a problem at sea. Being in port, with the comings and goings of crew, the loading and unloading of cargo, and the proximity to land, buildings, and other vessels, created a great deal of cleaning work for the crew.

The remaining images discussed focus on Galveston-based aspects of waterfront work. A crucial component of a successful port operation was the availability of ship services. Ship services may be loosely defined as those skills, equipment, and supplies necessary to maintain vessels in operating condition. When producing promotional materials for the port, both the Wharf Company and the Commerical Association devoted space to describing the array of facilities available. Some of those services are represented here. Gulf Marine Ways, at Seventh Street and Wharf, offered drydock services for small craft. This particular image (V-2936) shows three smaller vessels—the pilot boat J. F. Rader, the motor vessel Sally Ann, and Texas No. 9, a shrimper. The Rader and Sally Ann are hauled out for repair, and the third vessel floats nearby. The two

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boats out of the water might have been hauled out for inspection, hull repair, or new coatings. The image demonstrates the facilities as well as the type and size of vessels that might be accommodated, and by showing a pilot boat all the way from Sabine as a client, the business advertises its proficiency. Pilot boats operated in every port, guiding ships in and out of area waters, and pilots' knowledge of the waterfront services that were available was extensive. Notes with the negative indicate that the picture was taken January 9, 1941.

A larger repair job is captured in V-1530. One of a series, this view of the China Arrow was taken as collision damage was being repaired. Other negatives document the damage and repair, but none capture the multi-level "busy-ness" of the endeavor or the ship's skeleton as well. With damaged plates removed, the framing of the ship is visible from the outside and how the hull's skin is attached becomes more evident. The number of plates involved in a hull form, their curve, and their attachment is suggested. Individuals may be seen on all levels, with workmen on the pier, standing on the deck and present but partially hidden on interior decks; empty scaffolding implies their presence elsewhere.

While Galveston was primarily concerned with exports—cotton, grain, flour, sulphur, etc.—there were two important imports, sugar and bananas. Galveston was the port of entry for raw sugar bound to the Imperial Sugar Company located in Sugarland, Texas, during this period. The sugar arrived in bags and was transferred to railroad cars within 30 to 36 hours. 36 Bananas were the second major import. The port prided itself on the handling of perishable fruit in a timely manner and stressed that "only a few hours are required to transfer a full cargo, of about 20,000 bunches, from ship to refrigerator

36 *ibid.*, p. 51.
cars.\textsuperscript{37} The Wharf Company had a longstanding relationship with United Fruit Company, and the importer operated a banana handling facility located at Piers 19 and 20. Mechanical banana unloaders and conveyor belts removed the stalks from a ship's hold to the pier structures where they were transferred to cold storage railroad cars on tracks that ran into the transit shed.\textsuperscript{38} The railroad dispersed the fruit throughout the country, as far north as Chicago and Milwaukee, east to Memphis, and west to Denver, Salt Lake City, Reno, and Phoenix.\textsuperscript{39}

The Verkin image (V-2843) leaves no doubt that bananas are the commodity being processed; a large stalk fills the right foreground and moves back toward two men monitoring the process and poised to intervene. The role of the worker is far more passive in this view; the men are observers, not active participants. Because the handling was so mechanized, workers were not needed for this part of the job, although the later job of conveying the stalks to the railcars was a backbreaking affair. Banana handling could be somewhat dangerous for other reasons. Aside from the weight of the stalks, exceedingly venomous tropical snakes that were extremely fond of banana trees frequently stowed away, dropping out of a stalk onto an unsuspecting longshoreman.\textsuperscript{40}

Two of these images (V-2903, V-2904) are part of a larger series devoted to seafood packing. Both the \textit{Shippers Digest} and \textit{Galveston Wharf Company Magazine} published stories in the fall of 1931 describing "Galveston's newest shrimp handling plant."\textsuperscript{41} The second image, V-2904) shows the shrimpboats that bring the shellfish to

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Port Book}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Port Series no. 6.}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Port Book}, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Thomas Townsend, June 27, 1991, notes in possession of author.

\textsuperscript{41} "New Shrimp Cannery is in Operation, Product is Handled With Great Care,"
the plant. Crewmembers of the boats lounge on the decks and watch the photographer; crews appear to be both black and white. The processing plant is behind the boats. Both articles mention that seventy-five boats had been involved in the recent season. The second image (V-2903) is far more interesting. For the first time, women are part of the waterfront world. Two lines of relatively young to middle-aged women prepare the shrimp for packing. They are all dressed the same way and with similar hats or visor-like headgear. The photograph is captioned exactly the same in both publications and with no reference to the female employees: "Two views of operations [only one extant] of cleaning and canning shrimp at the newest Galveston plant are shown above. Every process is carefully handled by the workers who prepare this delicacy for consumption in this country and abroad." Of the two short essays concerning the plant, the employee magazine author pointedly enumerated the jobs provided by the new enterprise:

The twenty-five boats employ two or three each, making 75 in boats, and about 175 white and 75 colored in the plant, or a total of about 250 people and when we learn that this plant pays out about $1000 in cash each day, we can realize to some extent the part it plays in the local cash receipts of labor, 99-10/10 per cent of which is spent locally in all lines of business.

At this time, at least, race appears to be more important than gender.

Another fishing image (V-2482-B) turns out to be a specific record of a particular event. While it might appear to illustrate the greatest fish story ever or be a promotion for

*Shippers Digest* (September 23, 1931), p. 3; R. H. Lindh, "Galveston Shrimp," *Galveston Wharf Company Employee Magazine*, III (October 16, 1931) p. 4; the photo also appears in *Port of Galveston*, p. 67, captioned: "In the Shrimp Cannery, Galveston Shrimp, Inc."


43 Lindh, p. 4.
the fishing grounds of the Gulf Coast, the incredibly successful fisherman was the beneficiary of an unseasonable cold snap in January of 1930:

The accompanying photograph will serve to substantiate some of the fish stories which have been in circulation since that record-breaking cold spell which began two weeks ago and hovered over the Island for several days thereafter.

Four men went out into the channel in the small boat appearing in the picture, and within three hours time, with the use of cast nets, scooped up over 400 pounds of speckled trout, completely filling the boat. 44

The atypicality of the image—that it documents very particular and unique circumstances—points out one of the caveats attendant on using commercial archives, or any image, that is not identified. If a historian is interested in teasing information from visual sources, context is crucial, and otherwise interesting and captivating images may have to be abandoned if supporting explanatory materials are unavailable. Tracing how a particular image is used—or misused—over time may be a worthwhile and illuminating project, but attaching a specific historical meaning may be unsupportable by available evidence. Writing about mining photographs, Eric Margolis cautions that "[i]n the attempt to contextualize photographs, they must be evaluated carefully against other evidence . . . . Photos require context to fulfill their potential to inform—every picture does not tell a story." He goes on to stress the value of determining a picture's context. "In discovering the actual and unique circumstances of the photograph, we come to a deeper and clearer understanding of the era; in broadly comprehending the era, we determine a more precise meaning for the image. The photograph thus becomes rich in significations that go far beyond simple illustration." 45

44 Galveston Wharf Company Employee Magazine, 1 (January 16, 1930), inside back cover.

45 Eric Margolis, "Mining Photographs: Unearthing the Meanings of Historical Photos,"
The Verkin image (V-2929) is a group portrait of Morgan Line employees. They are identifiable as Morgan Line workers because of the house flag behind the group. Morgan vessels had been calling at the port of Galveston since the 1850s, and Morgan's relations with the Wharf Company had not always been the best. By the 1930s (the most likely dating of this image), the Morgan Line was part of Southern Pacific Steamship Lines but continued to be known by its earlier title. The Line provided semi-weekly service to New York and berthed at Pier B, located at the foot of Forty-fifth Street. The photograph was taken at a warehouse, possibly near the Morgan dock, and the administrative staff is pictured; these are white-collar workers, as evidenced by dress shirts, suit coats, and and ties on the men and fashionable dresses on the women. There are no blacks among the group, and few, if any, laborers. This gathering is representative of the extensive bureaucracy supporting the various shipping agents, wholesalers, insurers, and shipping line office personnel, who are not identifiable as waterfront workers but no less dependent on the fortunes of the port.

The final Verkin images considered (V-2822, V-2786) are part of a series of photographs that were taken to document construction of Elevator B, a structure discussed at some length in the previous chapter. Images from this series are included in the dedication program, but the pictures are included here to suggest the work involved in the building and maintenance of the piers and wharves themselves. Viewed as industrial landscapes, these two images show the skeleton of the wharf system and its literal underpinnings. At their most basic level, ports are their piers, and wharf structures and the quality of their facilities determine success or failure. The Port of Galveston was established when Samuel May Williams and William McKirney built a pier into the


46 See chapter 2; Port Series no. 6, p. 38.
channel along the backside of the island, and less than a hundred years later the Wharf Company was repeating the act, illustrating that while tools, materials, and magnitude of construction might change, the goal—and its centrality to the success of the port—remained the same. Regardless of Galveston's natural assets, without competitive, safe facilities, the Wharf Company would not survive.

Construction of the elevator began in August 1929 with the driving of 14,000 sub-foundation pilings, timbers ranging in length from 40 to 65 feet. Steam-driven pile drivers pounded the sticks 5 to 6 feet below ground level. Reinforced concrete sheet pilings were installed as the channel-side bulkhead, each of these measuring 60 feet long and 12 by 16 inches and reinforced with steel rods and wire. Once the bulkhead was in place, the area of the 14,000 pilings was excavated until the piling heads were two to three feet above ground. After the piling heads were sawed off and the area graded, 52,000 cubic yards of concrete were poured to serve as the elevator's foundation. The dedication program describes the building of this edifice in great detail, and the photographs suggest the magnitude of the project. That the construction was so completely recorded is further evidence of the high hopes held by the Wharf Company for this new facility.

The Verkin images discussed above represent a cross-section of working people found on the waterfront, but an equally integral labor force arrived and departed on the tides. The ships that were the lifeblood of the port carried an entirely separate workforce charged with the operation and maintenance of their vessels. A transient but everpresent population in any port city, sailors slip through the cracks of most historical records. Unlike captains or ships' mates with higher levels of education, license requirements, and ties to a regular employer, sailors were often itinerant, leaving a ship when it arrived in a

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47 *Galveston Wharf Company Dedicates Elevator "B"*, program, dated May 9, 1931, Galveston Wharf Company vertical files, Rosenberg Library, pp. 12-17.
port and shipping out at the next opportunity. Rarely officially resident in any community, seafarers' lives were largely off the record, which is why a small collection of glass plate negatives at the Louisiana State Museum is so intriguing.

Although the negatives were produced in New Orleans, their inclusion is logical for a variety of reasons. First of all, New Orleans and Galveston were intensely competitive ports during most of the time covered by this work, and the two Gulf ports had far more in common—climate, workers, commodities, shipping lines—than not. Secondly, one of the defining factors of ships and shipping is the transience of the enterprise. Vessels, and their crews, traveled from port to port in the nature of their work. Most likely, many of the men pictured in these images had called in Galveston aboard these ships or others. Seaports were far more like other seaports than they were like towns and cities inland.

This small series of negatives—only about 80 in all—is a group of portraits, sailor portraits, taken by New Orleans photographer Achille Simon. At the age of 12, Simon began working for his uncle, Eugene, who operated a photography studio, in 1879. From there he went to work for Frazier and Hardy, a photography studio located at 606 Magazine. In 1919, Simon opened his own studio at 637 Canal Street and remained in business until his sudden death from a heart attack in 1930. Although his wife and family tried to keep the business going, they were unable to continue and abandoned the building, with its negative archive, sometime in the mid to late 1930s. Sometime in the mid-1950s the negatives were given to the Louisiana State Museum. On February 4, 1979, the New Orleans Times Picayune carried some pictures and an article about the collection, hoping that a reader might recognize one of the images and respond with more information about the collection. Mrs. Charles D. Lindberg, formerly Helen Simon (one of the photographer's daughters), contacted the museum and provided some additional
information.\textsuperscript{48}

The collection is a large one, composed of approximately 23,000 glass negatives. Curator Bert Harter noted in a letter that "Mr. Simon was not a society photographer. His subjects are of the middle class. Collectively, his work is a window on the basic fabric of American society, not its gaudy social upper crust."\textsuperscript{49} Among those subjects were approximately 80 sailors aboard two vessels calling at the port of New Orleans. Notes with the collection indicate that Simon was hired by H. Aubrey Swazey, deputy collector of customs, to take portraits of two ships' crews, sailors aboard the \textit{Munarden} and \textit{Muntropic}, when the ships arrived in New Orleans. \textit{Munarden} arrived in November 1929 with transit cargo and departed for South America on the 12th of that month and called again in the city in April 1930. \textit{Muntropic} arrived May 28, 1930, and departed on June 5, also bound for South America.\textsuperscript{50} Most likely Simon was taking identification pictures for the Seaman's Passport Bureau, an agency attached to the U.S. Customs Office.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} Notes on Achille Simon Collection, n.d., Louisiana State Museum. The documentary record of the collection is contained in a single box kept with the archive; "Mystery Shootings in Museum," New Orleans \textit{Sunday Times Picayune Dixie Magazine}, February 4, 1979; letter from J. B. Harter to Elizabeth Swanson, May 28, 1980, Notes on Achille Simon collection. Because of questions of provenance, the museum has become extremely reluctant to permit research in this collection. Only agreements from the museum's director obtained in 1990 allowed the author access to the files and only negatives already printed in 1990–91 could be used in this work.

\textsuperscript{49} Letter from Harter to Swanson, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{50} Handwritten notes contained in Achille Simon collection documentation box. Achille Simon Collection, Louisiana State Museum.

\textsuperscript{51} Customs records for this period are no longer available in New Orleans. The Customs Office said that all records that might contain information about such passports had been sent to the National Archives. In 1938 \textit{The Inventory of Federal Archives in the States Prepared by The Survey of Federal Archives Division of Women's and Profession Projects}, U.S. Works Progress Administration, The National Archives and Louisiana State University Cooperating Sponsors, Series III. Department of the Treasury No. 17, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1938, recorded 59 feet of folders containing seaman passport materials.
However these images came into being, they offer a glimpse of individuals not usually seen before a camera, especially not on shipboard in the course of their daily work. Three of twenty-two images are horizontal in orientation, the remaining nineteen are vertical. The subjects are all male and appear to range in age from late teens/early twenties to late middle age. Some even look elderly. The group is racially mixed, with a black, at least one hispanic, and some men who appear to be almost stereotypically ethnic, mustaches and clothing suggesting Italian or Mediterranean origins. Other crew members are fair or dark within parameters suggesting general Anglo-Saxon forebears.

How the men appear in their portraits is quite varied. Some of the subjects are quite dirty, sitting in torn undershirts with disheveled hair. Others seem to have been excused briefly from work for the sitting and wear well-worn work clothes, the style of which ranges from almost naval garb—a white sailor cap and light shirt—to overalls and blue jeans. Several subjects testify to at least one enduring male accessory—the "gimme cap." A few others are identifiable as being attached to the steward's department because of their white jackets. And one subject, a young black man, wears a suit and tie and stares, almost unseeingly, at the camera. There is obviously no required uniform—a characteristic that identifies these men as merchant seamen and not naval crew—and clothing is worn for its comfort and utility.

The images were taken at six different sites onboard ship. Given what is known about the commission and certain characteristic props—railings, engine telegraph, portholes, deck furniture—that are within view, these photographs were almost certainly taken on the vessels. A makeshift backdrop is stretched across a deck in one view.

Writing in 1974, photographer Irving Penn remarked upon people's reactions to having their pictures taken in a studio. "[T]he one characteristic all these various people seem to have in common is that they rose to the experience of being looked at by a stranger, in most cases from another culture, with dignity and a seriousness of
concentration." Simon's subjects were in the most makeshift of studios, but their reactions too are serious and attentive. For the most part, Simon photographed the men at eye-level. In only a few does the camera look down upon the man, probably due to the camera equipment. There is an equality implied in this positioning, and the men return Simon's gaze directly and with some interest. Working men pulled from their tasks, they are unvarnished and disingenuous, posed only insofar as they sit where told and face the proper direction. These are identification pictures, not personal memorials commissioned by the men. As identification portraits, these likenesses are a far distance from elaborately executed portraits commissioned by the wealthy, and even some length from the commemorative daguerreotype or snapshot. They are a twentieth-century industrial construction of identity, necessary when workers are unknown to employers and when employment may be far-ranging.

One of the reasons these portraits are so striking is that their subjects are so anonymous and that the historical context that the images may be assigned is so general. Anonymity invites imaginative projection, and because the faces are so interesting, so varied, and so open, a viewer's curiosity is almost welcomed. Only a few of the gazes are hostile or suspicious; for the most part, they are disinterested, dogged, or mildly inquisitive. They at once represent everyman; and everyman as common laborer, a guise not often seen. They are alert and engaged, and they, in turn, engage the viewer. These are not pictures taken to illustrate dangerous working conditions; these are not images commissioned for advertising brochures. The photographs are a necessary component of the workers' lives, another tool for their trades. The sailors and the photographer meet on equal footing, and the pictures are richly evocative for that fact.

Combining the Verkin and Simon collections creates a body of photographs that

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portrays the range of humanity found on the waterfront and the variety of tasks those individuals undertake. The work of both photographers shows a respect for waterfront workers and an appreciation of their diverse skills. Through these images, modern viewers better understand the workings of a port and the myriad components that comprise this unique industry.
Chapter Four:

"You Paint Me a Ship as is Like a Ship": The Verkin Ship Portraits

When the English poet C. Fox Smith wrote a poem called "Pictures," she wanted to explain to the landlocked what it was that sailors sought in paintings of ships. Her protagonist, Bill, tells his audience, "Some likes pictures o' women/an' some likes 'orses best / . . . But I likes pictures 'o ships . . . an' you can keep the rest / . . . An' I don't care if it's North or South, the Trades or the China Sea / Shortened down or everything set—close-hauled or runnin' free / You paint me a ship as is like a ship . . . an' that'll do for me."1 With accurate representation the most highly prized attribute of ship paintings among those connected to maritime industries, photography seemed to be the perfect medium for creating a visual record of ships and shipping, and photographers familiar with waterfronts became the logical successors to legions of "pierhead painters." As evidenced by the surviving archive, the Verkin Studio created such a record for the port of Galveston, and, in the process, produced a valuable, very traditional collection of ship portraits.

The Verkins loved ships. Both Paul Verkin and Paul R. Verkin spent hours on the docks and piers of Galveston taking photographs of the vessels that called there. An extensive documentary record of watercraft that were active in the port was the primary fruit of these endeavors—some of these images created in the regular course of work for the Galveston Wharf Company or other clients, some taken because the Verkins were intrigued by a particularly unique vessel, and a significant number of the pictures shot "on-spec," taken, developed, and printed to be sold to the ship's officers and crew as

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they disembarked in the island city. In taking these images and marketing them in this way, the Verkin Studio was not only creating an invaluable documentary collection of ship images but also perpetuating the centuries-old practice of ship portraiture.

Examination of a selection of ship photographs from the Verkin Studio reveals the diversity of ship types within the record assembled by the studio. This chapter analyzes thirty-one pictures of ships from the Verkin collection, a small portion of the 3000+ negatives that survive and an even lesser percentage of the thousands of negatives created by the studio over its time in business. The images were selected largely because of the variety of ship types they represent—from large ocean-going international carriers to smaller, local service craft. From this relatively small selection, however, two distinctly different kinds of information emerge. First of all, as documentation, the images record the diversity of vessels that called in the port of Galveston or worked its waters on a daily basis. Secondly, both in their circumstances of production and appearance, the pictures testify to the perpetuation of the practice of ship portraiture through the modern medium of photography.

As a major port on the Gulf of Mexico, Galveston welcomed a steady stream of vessels, especially in the years that the port dominated cotton carriage. Even as late as 1936, forty-five steamship lines served the city, with forty-two of them offering regular foreign service and three working coastal routes. In addition, craft moving goods through the intracoastal canal (constructed during the operation of the Verkin Studio) and numerous local vessels called in the port for one reason or another. If the archive is any indication, the Verkins never lacked for subject matter.

While exact dating of the thirty-one images that are considered here is impossible,

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the identified vessels in the photographs were built between the years 1885 and 1930.\textsuperscript{3} Ten of the pictures were printed from glass negatives, nineteen from nitrate film stock, and two from safety film (both images printed from safety film stock were probably copied from glass negatives). Three pictures, the five-masted schooner \textit{Cora F. Cressy} (V-1865), the four-masted schooner \textit{Helen Thomas} (V-1869), and “an unidentified fishing schooner under sail off Galveston” (V-3066), are traditional sailing vessels that might or might not have possessed auxiliary motor power. Five other ships, \textit{Concho} (V-44), \textit{Britannia} (V-1749), \textit{Joseph Henry} (V-771), the army transport \textit{McClellan} (V-126), and steam yacht \textit{Casiana} (V-1030) appear to have been equipped with some sailing capability. The remaining ships are more modern steam or oil-fired cargo carriers. When these single images are studied in conjunction with other more panoramic port scenes (see V-2595, taken in 1920, in the previous chapter), the extensive intermingling of old and new, large and small, complex and simple, becomes even more apparent. Clearly, a vastly diverse fleet might be in port at any given time, and ships of the most advanced technology might berth near the most basic of sailing vessels while all were tended by specialized local craft providing necessary port services. At this time, the needs of maritime commerce created profitable niches for many different kinds of ships. Indexing to the collection provides information concerning the place of construction for each vessel. Of the twenty-five vessels whose building location is identified, only two, \textit{Itompa} (V-2025) and \textit{Natenna} (V-693), were built in Texas—in Orange, Texas, to be exact. These two vessels are also interesting from another standpoint. Part of a building program undertaken by the U. S. Shipping Board at the end of World War I, the two wooden steamships were built in 1918 and 1920, respectively,\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{3} Typescript index to the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. The index entries for each images may be found in appendix B. All information regarding place of construction, ownership, and operation of the ships pictured in these images comes from this index.
as part of a governmental effort to increase and support the construction and operation of American-built vessels. The U. S. Shipping Board was created in response to shortages of shipping tonnage during and after World War I. For the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, the bulk of U.S. shipping was carried in foreign vessels, and the outbreak of war in 1914 stranded large amounts of American cargo. Ships were destroyed in confrontations with the enemy; the vessels of the Central Powers were forced into idleness through blockade; and Allied tonnage was pressed into war service. In January 1915 Woodrow Wilson proposed a federal shipping agency. "The Shipping Act of 1916 created a federal agency, the United States Shipping Board, to promote, investigate, regulate, and administer the shipping industry." In addition, Congress approved $50 million dollars for the board to establish a government corporation that would purchase and operate vessels. 4 For the first time, the American government subsidized the construction and operation of ships to assure adequate capacity for U.S. commerce. The wooden steamers depicted here were built in Orange, Texas, as part of the U.S. Shipping Board's effort to support maritime industries throughout the nation and expand construction capacity. Besides the two Texas-built ships, two others that are pictured hailed from Gulf ports—Bessemer City (V-937) from Chickasaw, Alabama, and City of Galveston (V-2329), a fireboat built in Jacksonville, Florida.

The remaining twenty-seven vessels among the thirty-one under examination, however, confirm the prevailing belief that most shipbuilding was centered elsewhere. Three vessels were built in Newport News, Virginia, and three in Maine. Four others

were built at bay or river ports—Newburgh, New York (on the Hudson River); Chester, Pennsylvania and Camden, New Jersey (both on the Delaware River) and Kearny, New Jersey (on Newark Bay). Three others were of Great Lakes vintage (West Superior, Wisconsin; Ecorse, Michigan; and Ashtabula, Ohio). Five of the ships were from the United Kingdom—three from Newcastle, England; one from Belfast, Ireland; and one from Greenock, Scotland, evidence of the ongoing British presence in international shipping. Two vessels from Germany (Hamburg and Stettin) and a single ship from France (Marseilles) complete the sample. In addition to reinforcing the notion that all kinds of ships operating with varying levels of technology could find work, this international regatta reaffirms the cosmopolitan nature of ports.

What vessels, then, are chronicled? Much may be gleaned by close examination of the photographs. The easiest way to identify a ship is by simply reading the name on the bow. Where this is impossible, those familiar with steamship companies may determine a ship’s identity from distinctive insignia on her smoke stacks or from house flags flown on board; a national flag indicates a ship’s country of registry. Four of the pictured vessels functioned primarily as passenger liners. Two of the ships, El Norte (V-1180) and Concho (V-44), represent the two most important clients of the Port of Galveston. El Norte was owned and operated by Southern Pacific Steamship Company, more familiar to Galveston residents as the Morgan Line. Concho, on the other hand, was a Mallory ship—Morgan’s great competitor—that had been built at Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1891, and was one of the regular steamers providing service from Galveston to the eastern seaboard. Both ships are “dressed,” flying signal flags in celebration of arrival or departure—or simply in honor of having a picture taken. Also included among the passenger ships is the Iroquois (V-1667), a beautiful liner built in 1927 by the Clyde Line, a later partner of the Mallory interests. Another passenger liner, the French-owned Mexique (ex-Lafayette, V-3096), is pictured in classic postcard style—broadside,
steaming through the water with stacks smoking as she makes her way down channel. Unlike the photograph of *Iroquois*, there is no local shrimper in attendance to suggest scale or speed; the *Mexique* steams sleekly along, the narrow hull form slicing across the heavy, almost equally sized horizontal areas of sky and sea that seem to sandwich the ship in the center of the image. The small bow wave and smoke direction suggest forward progress, and the sharply distinct wave action in the foreground sweeps the eye toward the ship, adding to the impression of movement.

The port moved more freight than passengers, and many of the images under review portray the kinds of vessels employed in this work. As if to suggest the loading and unloading of cargo, three freighters are pictured at their respective docks. *Bessemer City* (V-937), *Winona County* (V-518) and *Antilochus* (V-175) are photographed from piers opposite the vessels. In each case, the ships are high in the water, awaiting loading or with a cargo recently discharged. They could probably carry a few passengers but were not designed or equipped for the hundreds that could be accommodated on a passenger liner. The *Antilochus* is the oldest of the three, built in Newcastle, England, in 1906, and her years of work are reflected in her rusty hull. That she saw service in waters made dangerous by war is suggested by the “dazzle” paint style on her hull. Ships were painted in elaborately confusing patterns to camouflage them against submarine attack or when traveling through enemy territory. *Coosa* (V-1493), was a British-built vessel (Newcastle, England, in 1896) that was eventually purchased by the U.S. Shipping Board. She provides another example of a camouflaging hull treatment. *Antilochus* is also noteworthy for her forest of cargo booms and ventilators, indicating multiple cargo hatches and compartments. *Winona County* was also a U.S.Shipping Board vessel and is shown berthed alongside one of Galveston’s grain elevators. The ship is getting up steam, with smoke streaming from her stack and engine cooling water being discharged over the side. She may be moving into position prior to loading. In each of the three
cases, the photographer looks up at the pierside vessels, in a manner different from traditional ship portraiture. It is quite possible that these images were taken to promote the facilities of the port of Galveston, or that one of the Verkins, on the wharf for some other business, took the picture out of personal interest. Nevertheless, the ships in these pictures are depicted as strong, impressive objects. They stretch across the frame, the rise of their bows working against straight lines of the horizon, conveying lift and power. Even the position of the rusted, rattle-trap *Antiloarus* suggests stability.

Many of the images of cargo carriers included here were selected to convey the range of ship types and appearances that could be found along the waterfront during the period Verkin worked. Vessels like *Almeria Lykes* (V-262), *Lady Marion* (V-1233), *Guaratuba* (V-1903), and *Tweedbank* (V-2186) kept to a regular schedule of arrivals and departures, carrying more specific kinds of goods. Tankers carried various liquid petrochemical products, while other ships carried sacked goods; bags or cartons on pallets; or bulk grain or sulphur that was loaded through long chutes directly into a hold. Refrigerated carriers, like the *Olancho* (V-1656), brought bananas from Central America into Galveston, while other similarly equipped ships carried meat or produce. Perhaps the most unusual vessel included here is the *Britannia* (V-1749), a whale-back barge equipped with sails. Built in West Superior, Wisconsin, she was probably constructed for the Great Lakes; records indicate that by 1927 she was owned by Sabine Towing and Transport Company, a firm based in Port Arthur, Texas, ownership that might explain her presence in Galveston.

Also included in this sampling are watercraft important to the operation of the port. *Kalita* (V-2681) and the U.S. Coast Guard vessel *CG-116* (V-2680) were part of

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5 Images of ships alongside piers may be found in most port promotional materials. See, for example, *Port Book*, pp. 40, 42, 48, 50; *Galveston Wharf Company Dedicates Elevator "B"*, program, dated May 9, 1931, Galveston Wharf Company vertical files, Rosenberg Library, p. 16.
V-2680
the complement of vessels maintained by the service at their Galveston office. During this time period, the Coast Guard kept approximately 200 men in Galveston to "prevent smuggling and enforce navigation laws." In addition, they operated lifesaving stations elsewhere on the island and maintained a collection of small craft that aided in rescue efforts.⁶ Their primary base of operations was located on Pelican Spit (now Pelican Island) and the absence of a bridge from Galveston Island to the Spit made it necessary for the Coast Guard and most other enterprises located there to operate ferries to convey workers back and forth. (A bridge did not connect the two areas until 1958.)⁷ Kalita and CG-116 were undoubtedly two among many of the small craft operated by the service. Kalita appears to have been photographed on a holiday—she is dressed and carrying men and women dressed more formally than might be expected on a work day. Guests lounge on the bow, in the forward cabin, and on deck. Pelican Spit is in the background, identifiable by the names on the storage tanks on shore. CG-116, despite the five crewmen watching the photographer from the bow, was captured in a more businesslike manner. Her crew is in uniform; there are no women, and no displays of flags. Perhaps she is on routine patrol.

One of the ways workers traveled to and from Pelican Spit was via Bohemian (V-943). This small motor vessel—primarily a fishing and excursion launch—had been built in 1880 in Boston, Massachusetts,⁸ and was one of several that plied the channel waters transporting people between the two land masses. Advertising the North Jetty Fishing Pier along her awning, the small boat carries a mixed group of laborers and men in suits, many of whom appear interested in the photographer's effort. Chas Clarke (V-66), a tug

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⁶ Port Book, p. 54.


⁸ Verkin collection index, p. 45.
boat owned and operated by Bay Towing Company, was a 200-ton vessel that had been built in 1899 in Camden, New Jersey. She was one of four tug/tow boats operated by Bay Towing Company, and easily the most powerful. Steam powered, 108.9 feet long, and with a 22.6 foot beam, Chas. Clarke could muster 900 horsepower to prod, shift, and propel ships into and out of berths along the wharves. She was named after Charles Clarke, one of the first operators of a stevedoring company in Galveston. In this particular picture, her decks are filled with people and she flies a massive U.S. flag on an aft flagpole and probably her owner's flag forward. She might be occupied ferrying people to and from Pelican Island, be part of a welcoming flotilla for a visiting naval vessel, or be engaged in some other ceremonial duty. Another steam tug is included among these images, C. W. Morse (V-1713), a slightly smaller boat built in Bath, Maine, in 1889. She is owned by a company other than Bay Towing; her smokestack bears a different pattern of paint. Both vessels have fenders out—objects cast over the side to cushion contact with other ships, piers, or barges—and both of these vessels probably tow other ships or maneuver them “on the hip,” that is, secured to the side of a ship rather than pushing with the bow. Tugboats that nudge and nose their charges have elaborate protective fendering on their bows. Tug or towboat services were necessary for port operations, as was the city fireboat.

The diesel-powered City of Galveston (V-2329), a fireboat, was built in Jacksonville, Florida in 1929 and purchased by the city for fire protection along the waterfront. The steel motor vessel was 87 feet long and 18.6 feet wide with a mean draft of 6 feet. She was powered by a 250-horsepower engine but saved her real power for the pumps. In 1931 the Wharf Company proudly claimed that the "craft makes use of the

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9 Series No. 6, p. 54;

10 Ibid., p. 57.
latest features and attains a speed of 12 knots per hour” and went on to assure clients “she is docked near the center of the waterfront, at Pier 23, and can quickly reach trouble at any quarter of the wharves.” Two crews were available round-the-clock, and her two 500 horsepower engines were capable of pumping 7,500 gallons of water per minute. The fireboat was a prized possession, owned by the city and manned by the fire department. The Wharf Company repeatedly cited the vessel’s “instantaneous response,” her capacity “to respond at an instant’s notice,” and the fact that she “has always been ready.” While stressing the fireboat’s preparedness, the Wharf Company reassured its audience that “the fireboat has not been called upon to play any spectacular role at a big fire.” This particular picture captures City of Galveston in the channel off her regular station at Pier 23 as she demonstrates her 7,500 gallon capacity—on a variety of trajectories—in a major display of fire fighting hubris.

The last local service vessel included in this sampling is Hicpochee (V-1806). Small dredges like this one, owned by the Southern Dredging Company, kept the slips clear. While the Corps of Engineers could be relied upon to maintain the depth of the main channel, currents and scouring action around the wharves and piers could cause sand and silt to build up along the waterfront. Hicpochee, and dredges like her, were usually unpowered; they would be towed where needed and put to work “vacuuming” the bottom, clearing away recent deposits and assuring deep water along the wharves. Dredges were also useful in salvage work and assisting vessels that ran aground.

Naval vessels were also frequent callers to the port, and Verkin captured many of the visitors on film. In this sampling, U.S. forces are represented by the steamship Joseph Henry (V-771), built in Newport News, Virginia, in 1909 and operated by the

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11 Port Book, p. 66.

Quartermaster Corps; the U.S. Army transport *McClellan* (V-126, ex-*Port Victor*) built in Newcastle, England, in 1885, owned and operated by the U.S. Army; and the light cruiser, *U.S.S. Memphis* (V-1692). The German navy is represented by the *Bremen* (V-121), a cruiser that was built in Stettin in 1902 and photographed during a visit to Galveston in 1905. Besides illustrating the variety of naval and military departments that operated vessels, comparing the images reveals interesting changes in ship design over several decades. The oldest vessel, *McClellan*, has a distinctive sailing ship hull with a sweeping sheer line and a clipper bow sporting carved and painted trailboards. She probably carried sail at one time and had been converted to steam power. Likewise, *Joseph Henry* has a less elegant hull form but nevertheless appears to have been equipped with sails. Masts and booms remain—perhaps converted for cargo handling—and the ship is missing only the canvas itself. Even the *Bremen*, with three smokestacks indicating significant steaming capacity, bears masts at rakish angles. The *U.S.S. Memphis*, on the other hand, has a more modern appearance, her masts devoted to communication and observation equipment rather than sails. The image of the *Memphis*, printed from a glass plate negative, has the name of the vessel engraved directly upon the negative, suggesting that the picture was mass produced for sale during the ship’s visit.

Four of the most striking pictures capture large sailing vessels and an elegant yacht that called in the port. These two schooners, *Cora F. Cressy* (V-1865) and *Helen Thomas* (V-1869), built in Maine in 1902 and 1905, respectively, could still operate profitably despite the prevalence of steam vessels. They most likely brought general cargo to the port and worked as tramp carriers, meaning that they went from port to port on no set schedule, finding and loading whatever needed to be carried to the next port. Upon unloading, the routine of securing another cargo began again. Cargos needing to meet no set schedule could be transported quite economically. The pictures of these two large schooners point out some of the limitations of photography in ship portraiture. Unlike a
painting, photographic images of the schooners portray the ships as they actually appeared at the time the image was taken. Sails are furled, and the ships lay at anchor. Where an artist could create an imaginative composition with all sail set and the vessel underway, a photographer shoots what is before the lens. The third sailing vessel (V-3066), photographed underway, is an unidentified fishing schooner under sail off Galveston. Although the negative is included in the larger collection, no identification has been made. Most likely the boat is one of numerous snapper schooners that fished offshore Gulf waters for days or weeks at a time, stored their catches on ice, and returned to sell their catches at the several fish and shellfish packing companies located on the wharves. The yacht is Casiana, a steam-powered motor vessel daintily tied at one of the lower piers rather than in the industrial setting of the commercial wharves. Without sails but rigged for auxiliary sail power, she also has a figurehead and carved trailboards. Caisana was built in Greenock, Scotland, in 1908, and her owner is listed as Edward L. Doheny.

The Galveston Wharf Company was a regular client of the Verkin Studio. Pictures of ships that were taken by the firm may be found in port promotional materials, annual reports, and employee publications. In addition, other community organizations used ship pictures from the Verkins as part of general island publicity.13 Besides taking pictures of ships for these local interests, Verkin Studio photographers—frequently one of the Verkins—would photograph ships as they sailed or steamed up the channel prior to

docking or as they were eased into a berth on the Galveston waterfront. After securing the desired image, the photographer would hurry back to the studio (located very near the most active part of the wharves), develop the film, and make prints of the best pictures. Later, prints in hand, Verkin or one of his employees would offer the images for sale to the officers and crew.\textsuperscript{14} This process—the rapid creation of a ship's portrait in port for sale to her crew—was a practice that originated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A particular kind of itinerant artist who lived near the waterfronts of England and Europe specialized in sketching and painting newly arrived ships and then offering their works to the ship's crew. Owners or captains could commission expensive oil paintings of a favorite ship, and regular crew members often were no less proud of their respective vessels. A small, inexpensive, and quickly executed painting on a board or piece of fabric could be a prized possession at the end of a voyage. These renderings—ship portraits—are a special kind of image with a distinctive art historical pedigree.

Within the field of art history, ship portraiture is generally considered to be a subset of marine painting. Marine painting, in turn, is traditionally understood to be a kind of landscape painting. In \textit{American Marine Painting}, John Wilmerding argues that "marine painting belongs on an equal level of related, coherent interest. Often the two areas run parallel to each other: seldom is one an integral part of the other. We have cousins here, or brothers perhaps, but not parent and child."\textsuperscript{15} Within the category of marine painting may be depictions of anything sea-related, including seascapes, shoreside scenes of fishermen or busy ports, commemorative views of famous battles, launchings

\textsuperscript{14} Conversations with Verkin descendants and Eric Steinfeldt confirm this practice.

or embarkations, and ship portraits. What distinguishes ship portraits, however, is the overriding commitment to the accuracy of the representation. With roots that are equal parts graphic or drafting in nature as well as artistic, the ship portrait is a hybrid product of excellent drawing and intentional style. The Verkins, in producing their ship images, represent merely the next in a long succession of ship portraitists, following a path trod by Dutch, British, French, and Italian artists since the seventeenth century.

Views of ships within larger works may be found in ancient Egyptian and Greek art. 16 As the sea became a more important factor in human activities, visual materials and representations included more and more water-related images. Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey both concern sea voyages and representations of these epics include depictions of ships. The story of Noah and the flood and various biblical references to fishing were maritime subjects that were incorporated into religious art. Boats and ships carried symbolic weight in particular visual contexts as well. Ships appeared on the seals of maritime cities as early as the twelfth century and are “surprisingly accurate” in rendering vessels later recovered or understood through other means. 17 As techniques for creating portraits of prominent individuals developed, ships were frequently incorporated in the background as signifiers of wealth, victory, or extensive travel in a painting of a nobleman, naval officer, or wealthy merchant.

Voyages of exploration from England and the European continent that began toward the end of the late middle ages and increased during the Renaissance into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provided subject matter for a wide variety of representations that commemorated discovery, conquest, and European expansion. Some of the earliest marine imagery documents the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588,

16 Leek, The Art of Nautical Illustration, pp. 14–16.

depictions that began a long British tradition of painting naval battle scenes.\textsuperscript{18} In addition, increases in both the complexity of ship construction and the size of vessels meant that more and more drawings were created to guide the shipbuilder. An English shipwright, Matthew Baker, wrote and illustrated the manuscript, \textit{Elements of Shipwrightery}, c. 1585.\textsuperscript{19} The drawings from this work are technical in nature, seeking to convey by accurate mechanical representation the correct dimensions, proportions, and orientation of galleons of the period. Prior to the mid-sixteenth century, however, the evolution of marine painting, in technique and the treatment of its subject matter, lagged far behind other kinds of painting in creativity and innovation.

The rise of Dutch shipping, the increasing wealth of that region, and political struggles for independence brought with it an attendant growth in consumption and commemorative art for an expanding class of affluent merchants and financiers. Prosperous individuals commissioned or purchased visual records of their wealth (ships) or of their regional strengths (ships and shipping). Three particular phases in Dutch marine painting lifted that kind of representation to new technical and aesthetic levels and established the field as a distinct artistic form. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, artists concentrated on painting pivotal engagements at sea that led to Dutch independence from Spain. In addition, pictures of busy port scenes and voyages of exploration documented commercial expansion and economic growth. During the second, subsequent phase of marine painting, Dutch practitioners focused on the natural context of vessels, concentrating on sea, sky, and the depiction of wind and weather. The third and final phase of this distinctive art form saw a return to naval battles during the Anglo-

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}
Dutch wars. As artists worked to commemorate important vessels or naval engagements, however, some of them became intrigued by the challenge of depicting light, wind, and water, and moved landscape painting into new areas. "[J. M. W.] Turner, a marine epoch in himself, affords the supreme instance of one for whom the sea at every stage of his career was a vital complement to his view of the terrestrial scene."!

Ship portraits are generally evaluated by different standards than those usually applied to history paintings or even landscapes. As mentioned earlier, paintings, in order to be taken seriously by a maritime audience in a nation proud of its naval supremacy, had to depict ships accurately. The correct number of masts, proper rigging, appropriate sail configurations, and a realistic attitude of a ship in the water were crucial, whether portraying a pivotal naval battle or the most mundane of waterborne commerce. The great advancement of the Dutch marine artists was in painting ships that "looked right." Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611–1693) and his son, Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633–1707), are the most prominent and important marine painters of this period, not only for their combination of technique, accurate representation, and innovative subject treatments, but more because they moved to England in the early 1670s. Once in England, they continued to focus on marine painting and achieved great success. After 1674 each was paid a salary of £100 a year by Charles II and later James II to make drawings of sea battles and convert the renderings to paintings. This patronage resulted in the creation of a massive documentary record of watercraft from the period and in the establishment of a school of British marine artists.

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20 Ibid., p. 28; Gaunt, p. 11.

21 Gaunt, p. 11.

22 Leek, p. 41.

23 Ibid. See also, Ward-Jackson, pp. 4–5.
British support of marine painting and the availability of subject matter in the expanding and thriving English ports led marine artists to settle around active waterfronts. The presence and success of the Van de Veldes encouraged numerous lesser painters, and markets for marine representations grew. Not only did the British aristocracy commission paintings but a healthy demand for ship portraits arose from large communities of merchants and seamen that could be found in the port cities. And the artists in the lower social and economic strata of these urban areas could seldom support themselves from their ship paintings alone. Frequently, ship portrait painters paid the rent as draftsmen, house painters, ships' painters, or carvers of figureheads or other kinds of ship ornamentation. \(^24\) In addition, sea cadets learned drafting skills, and chart-making and coastal sketches were expected from navigation officers in the navy and merchant marine. Upon retirement, men with maritime careers, guided by their familiarity with ships and the sea, settled in waterfront areas and commenced producing ship portraits. Only a modern appreciation of primitive or naive art has granted these practitioners any attention in the fine arts world.

Painters of ships' portraits, then, emerged from two strains of artistic lineage. On the one hand, schools of highly trained, mostly landscape, artists supported by aristocratic or mercantile patronage, or public commission, created works depicting important maritime events or special vessels for the public sphere or the wealthy, whose financial success increasingly derived from things maritime. On the other hand, self-trained artisans speedily produced paintings for officers and crews of these ships, individuals more intimately engaged in the daily routine of maritime commerce and pressed for time but no less desirous of visual renderings of their equally esteemed commands or homes. An officer returning from a long overseas voyage could claim no

\(^{24}\) Leek, p. 42. Ward-Jackson, p. 5–6.
better souvenir than a portrait of his command, rendered in a foreign port and bearing the signature of a foreign artist. As Basil Greenhill, of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, wrote, "most masters and owners of small vessels could not afford the famous, but relied instead on a breed of artisan painter, a breed which grew up in the ports by demand, who for a small sum would produce a ship portrait, sometimes overnight." This sort of picture [ship portraits] owed as much if not more to the draughts and doodles of mariners, shipwrights and others of maritime calling . . . embracing the plebeian as well as the patrician.

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, merchant ships were usually the subjects of choice for shipowners, shipbuilders, and captains, and occasionally an owner would commission a single view of his entire fleet. George Mears (fl. 1870–1895) was "official marine artist to the London, Brighton, and South Coast railway" and painted representations of all the cross channel steamships operated by that company. The period from 1870 to 1914 was the glorious zenith of British commercial seapower. During the 1870s and 1880s, British seafarers built upon their dominant position and found employment for their ships all over the world. Huge sailing ships and powerful steam vessels traveled the world's oceans and passed each other from port to port. By 1900 tonnage registered in Great Britain equaled almost half of all the tonnage in the world, and by 1914 British ships would carry half the total sea trade of the world, two-thirds of the trade involving the British Empire, and over one-third of the trade between

25 Ward-Jackson, p. 16.


foreign countries. Demand for ship portraits, pushed by the numbers of men working in the industry, expanded with the trade, and most ports developed enclaves of pierhead painters who catered to the myriad sailors in any given port. Reuben Chappell (1870–1940), one of these painters who later gained respect for his portraits, “painted, on the spot, hundreds of vessels which represented the last days of sail” and “was prolific . . . as his livelihood depended on the few shillings which seafarers could afford in order to buy his pictures from him.”

Two other new kinds of enterprises increased the demand for ship portraits. Competition between steam and sail passenger lines meant more aggressive advertising for travelers and shippers. Broadsheets listed sailing times for the most modern, luxurious, and regular of passenger services and would often be embellished with portraits of the vessels, thereby providing visual evidence of a company’s claims. Local tradesmen also took advantage of a vessel’s visual appeal; “R. Crag Sailmaker Swansea” appears on the sails in a watercolor painting of the Swansea pilot schooner, Lion, implying that sails good enough for the pilots would be equally splendid for other craft. Besides private commissions and advertising uses, images of ships found their ways into the numerous new illustrated daily and weekly newspapers which, by the mid-to late-nineteenth century, felt obligated to provide their readers with visual representations of important stories. Beginning with the Crimean War, marine artists were sent to cover naval events pertaining to the conflict. They provided the illustrated


30 Leek, p. 128; Ward-Jackson, p. 15.

31 Brook-Hart, p. 21.

32 Ward-Jackson, p. 15.
press with sketches and drawings that could be reproduced to supplement correspondents' reports.\textsuperscript{33} By this time, marine artists also made lithographs from particularly successful marine representations for sale to the general public.\textsuperscript{34}

Ship portraits, however, no matter what their use, meet certain criteria and may observe particular conventions. "A ship portrait is a drawn or painted record of aspects of a particular vessel. It may exist in its own right or be a component of a composition portraying some happening or place, a naval action or port scene . . . The subject may be glorified, flattered, made fun of or treated in any other way. It is a portrait so long as it declares the identity of its subject."\textsuperscript{35} As mentioned above, accuracy was prized above all; but that did not necessarily mean a strictly realistic vision. Customers might request the exaggeration of certain details: "the flags—standards, ensigns, pennants, jacks, burgees, signals and demonstrations of nationality, ownership and identification. . . . In some portraits the direction in which they [flags] blow was governed not so much by wind as by readability, and a flag flying in an unrealistic direction is rarely an artist's 'mistake'. Flags mattered a great deal to the client—a master who was a Freemason would require his square-and-compass symbol flown. . . ."\textsuperscript{36}

The more professional artists often used models to guarantee accuracy, sometimes keeping many ships built to scale—or pieces of ships—to use for their paintings. Artist J. C. Schetky wrote to Admiral George White imploring that White’s sailmaker prepare and fit "in all particulars of gear—a fore-sail, fore-top-sail, and fore-top-gallant sail . . . for a frigate. . . . I have all masts, yards and rigging, complete and beautiful, but can’t get the

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 25.

\textsuperscript{34} Brook-Hart, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 3.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 25.
sails ship-shape. . . . You will perceive at once my object and desire to have this model—it is to place it on my lawn and draw from it, for there are no mast-heads to be seen here at Croydon; and I am much at a loss for details when my ships come large in the foreground." The so-called pierhead painters were frequently self-taught by years at sea or observed vessels in the ports where they lived.

The most basic and least skilled artists often strove for delineation only, with a lettered inscription "across the base of the composition recording perhaps in elegant copperplate the rig, ship name, port of registry, and name of commander. When drawn on light or dark base, it [the inscription] served to direct the viewer's gaze into the picture . . . . Where this device was not used the foreground was often represented as in shade cast by a cloud—a compositional ploy used again and again by the best practitioners." The ship was also presented in a very stylized fashion, usually broadside. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, showing a vessel in three different views within the same picture became popular. In addition to the most common broadside view, the same ship would be painted "sailing off to port and starboard." For more money, a stern or bow view of the same ship could be added to the composition. "The more that went into the picture, the larger it was, the costlier." Vessels were often positioned near a familiar point of land to commemorate a particular voyage or an especially fast passage, and the work might be inscribed with the name of the craft and date of landfall. Sometimes clients requested ships depicted under particular circumstances—in a gale off

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38 Ibid.

39 Brook-Hart, p. 16.

40 Ibid.
Cape Horn, for example, or engaged in a rescue or altercation with pirates.

In general, "the most elaborate works . . . were for naval officers and shipowners, the middling ones for the commanders of ocean-going merchantmen, the smaller shipbuilders and ship-brokers, the simplest for the masters, mates and lesser crew of coasting vessels." 41 This hierarchy of production illustrates both the size and variety of the ship portrait market. Ship portraiture style remained rigid and circumscribed until the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, largely because the men who purchased the images were intensely traditionalist themselves.

Surprisingly, given the stress upon accuracy demanded by purchasers of ship portraits, the use of photography in creating these images was slow in coming. Technological limitations were largely to blame, since the size of the equipment and long shutter speeds made it difficult to shoot objects that were constantly moving through the water or bobbing at anchor. Even vessels secured to a dock bob up and down according to tide or current, and early marine photographs are inevitably blurred. Eventually, more convenient cameras and faster lenses made good pictures of vessels possible, and some marine artists eventually used photographic images from which to paint. 42 And, as in the case of the Verkin Studio, some commercial photographers in port cities assumed the roles and the markets of lower-end ship portrait painters.

Looking at the sampling of ship images from the perspective of the history of ship portraiture offers another way of understanding these representations. The photographs follow ship portraiture convention in a number of important ways, but at the same time introduce both the limitations and possibilities afforded by photography. Like many paintings, most of the images are captured near familiar land areas. All of the pictures

41 Ibid., p. 26.

42 Leek, p. 90.
were taken either in the channel or berthed at one of the wharves. Familiar land structures
may be seen in the background—storage tanks and buildings on Pelican Island (V-693,
V-2681, V-943, V-2186) or Wharf properties (V-937, 1806, V-518). The Galveston
channel itself is very distinctive, a long, narrow stretch of water bordered near the
commercial wharves by jetties to the south and Pelican Island to the north. While this
attribute is indeed a convention of ship portraiture, Galveston channel geography also
facilitated capturing the vessel underway, most often broadside, another traditional aspect
of ship depiction. In fact, the topography of the channel and location of the port created a
uniquely propitious setting for the creation of photographic ship portraits. Every vessel
visiting Galveston passes through the constricting waterway. The narrowness of the
channel helped Verkin obtain clear, relatively close views of the watercraft that passed,
thereby appropriately fixing the vessel and its location in the representation. Without
elaborate special effects largely unavailable at this time, photographers obviously had
fewer options in situating their subjects; marine artists positioned painted ships within
familiar landscapes at the client’s request. Photographers had little other recourse, but this
coincidence of filmed and painted ship portraits worked to keep photographic portraiture
within the parameters of painted representation.

Besides locating their subjects in a comparable way, artists and photographers
also represented the vessels quite similarly. All of the images are horizontal. Rather than
emphasize the height of masts or stacks, both kinds of portraitists focus on the length of
the vessel as it stretches through the water. Twenty-three of the thirty-one images
considered here show vessels broadside, the most common point of view for ship
portraits. The generally straight orientation of the pictures is made more noticeable by the
strongly linear components of the images themselves—the horizon line, the length of the
ship’s hull form, the wave shadows on the water. Many of the ships seem to be
composed of layers of lines, with parallel levels of rails, decks, awnings, or portholes,
and even smoke spewing from stacks trails away in linear fashion. Vertical masts or stacks and diagonals of rigging are the only punctuation in the sweep of a hull. Motion is suggested but not apparent, conveyed by wakes, discharging smoke, or small bow waves. (Channel traffic is generally restricted to a very slow rate of speed, and a captain whose vessel was having its picture taken would probably cut his speed even further.) Marine photographers, like the Verkins, were familiar with traditional marine representations. They met with and dealt daily with sailors, officers, shipping executives, and wharf company representatives who possessed painted ship portraits and were used to seeing ships portrayed—in newspapers and publications—in very traditional ways. As commercial photographers, the studio was not hired to create innovative or path-breaking imagery; ship photographs were meant to conform to long established standards and conventions of ship paintings.

Moreover, representing a vessel broadside eliminates perspective and lessens any sense of depth or movement within the image that might be conveyed. A ship shown broadside appears to move cleanly across an image, entering and exiting the frame independently of the observer and conveying freedom, speed, intent, and unfettered progress. Where ships are captured in perspective, their sense of motion is more strongly suggested, but the observer is a more active participant. The ship either moves away or toward the viewer, implying an interaction or even interference, a stopping or starting. The frame of the image may be confining or directing; no longer does the ship simply move past and beyond. Perspective may make a ship appear more real, but reality is not necessarily the primary intended impression. Ships carry imaginative freight as well as goods and people, and those most desirous of ship portraits prize both the realistic depiction of the vessel and its implied journey, a voyage that might be constrained by an image too literal in its appearance.

Several of the Verkin pictures reveal the limitations of using this device described
above. In the Verkin photograph of *CG-116* (V-2680), the Coast Guard craft cuts through the water with a small bow wave, her plumb stem rising out and back from the channel while her burgee streams from the mast. The ship leans toward the photographer, the bow obviously closer than the stern. This proximity, however, and the need to take the photograph, actually confines *CG-116* and prevents the craft from attaining her true operational speed. The vessel is obviously interacting with the photographer on shore who is attempting to take the picture. On the one hand, this is an extremely accurate visual record of the boat; on the other hand, its literalness and complete authenticity leaves little to the imagination. Technical limitations of the medium restrict the presentation of the object, removing some of the romantic or fanciful connotations that might be attached to the view.

In a similar vein, the naval vessel *U.S.S. Memphis* (V-1692), slightly angled within the frame, gives a suggestion of movement, although calm waters and no wake work against such a perception. What makes the ship appear to be moving has more to do with the large white cloud area in the left side of the sky, with the way the top of two cloud banks recede almost exactly parallel to the tops of the communications masts and their wires, and with the large white hull of the ship and its reflection in the water on the left side of the picture. The composition of clouds, ship, and water, as well as the slanting to the right of the identification in the lower right of the frame, focus the eye on the left side of the image and move it swiftly down and to the right, following the ship’s hull further back into the view. The picture of *Olancho* (V-1656) is perhaps the most ambiguous of those examined here. The vessel is not centered in the frame and gives the impression of hurrying off to the left, slightly toward the photographer, perhaps moving so quickly that he barely had time to take his picture. Some of this sense of motion comes from the exaggeration of perspective caused by the hull paint scheme—the dark waterline is parallel to the channel, not the ship’s sheerline, and that makes the larger white hull
area seem to rise from the water and move forward. The ship's wake also suggests movement. The reality of the ship's motion is more accurately perceived by looking at the smoke stack and flags. The smoke rises and moves forward from the stack—not an indicator of forward motion at all—and the flags move sideways. Taking everything into consideration, the *Olancho* is probably moving slowly up channel in a light southeasterly wind. (Wind direction may be ascertained by knowing the ship's position in the channel and the prevailing winds for the island.) A painter depicting a ship on the open ocean operated under far fewer constraints than a photographer limited by equipment and location. Gains in accuracy were eroded by losses in vivid visualization.

In contrast, several of the ship pictures in this sample were taken of vessels as they lay at their respective berths (*Britannia* [V-1749], *Bessemer City* [V-937], *Casiana* [V-1030], *Antilochus* [V-175], *Winona County* [V-518], and *Hicpochee* [V-1806]). As mentioned earlier, these images were likely to have been used in port promotional materials, and do not fit the traditional categories of ship portraiture. The beauty and glory of ships is best seen when they are underway, and those commissioning or purchasing ship portraits wanted the vessels to be depicted actively engaged in their trade. A ship tied to the wharf might be a strong, stable component within a clear, informative composition, but the ship would be competing with equally strong, if not larger, shoreside objects. And the focus of activity immediately shifts to the grain elevator, warehouse, or pier, since the ship is purposely attached to the structure for some reason. Wharves and piers connecting the ship to the land worked against the idea of ships as independent, unfettered ocean vehicles. A ship tied to a pier is a passive structure being acted upon, and the craft appears to lose its capacity for agency.

While these kinds of images may reinforce the ties of ship portraiture to the larger field of landscape views, these photographs are industrial landscapes, not ship portraits. Photographic ship portraits, because of their subject matter and adherence to particulars of
representational convention, may be understood as a step in the evolution of ship portraiture, and examining Verkin's ship pictures tells a historian much about the activities on Galveston's waterfront. The images document port traffic, record the variety of craft working within the port, and confirm the diversity of shipping during this time period. In addition, the creation of these pictures, for the most part utilizing visual conventions and centuries-old practices of manufacture and sale, points to continuity in the craft of ship portraiture whereby photography—the quick and inexpensive way to obtain representations from life—supplants the quick and inexpensive pierhead painter. Given the high value attached to accurate representation in ship portraiture, using photography to generate these kinds of images is a natural development in the larger, and separate, history of the genre.
Chapter Five:

"Everything That Mortal Men Can Do": Raising Galveston Island

On September 8, 1900, a hurricane of immense proportions swept across Galveston Island, killing thousands and devastating the thriving port city. Death toll estimates ranged from 6,000 to 8,000 people, and property damage was calculated at approximately $30 million.¹ Almost immediately after the storm, citizens vowed to return and rebuild. "It is not time yet to talk of the future," commented the Galveston Tribune four days later, "except to say it is all ours, and when we are fed, clothed and healed we shall seize it all and make it glorious . . . ." In reply to an inquiry from "a great New York paper" as to whether the community would rebuild, the Galveston Daily News answered "that Galveston did not intend to succumb to her crushing misfortune, but would again resume her place as the great port of the gulf . . . ."² Optimistic but wary of future occurrences, the Engineering Record gravely counseled that "before the city can assume the importance its geographical position renders possible, it must be made safe against such inundations as wrecked it a fortnight ago . . . ."³ The island had always been vulnerable to tropical weather systems, but the magnitude of the damage and the

¹ "The Great Storm," as it has come to be called, has been extensively documented in article and book. This hurricane still ranks as the worst natural disaster, in terms of loss of life, to strike the United States. See John Edward Weems, A Weekend in September (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1957, 1980) and Herbert M. Mason, Death From the Sea (New York: Dial Press, 1972). For contemporary accounts, E. B. Garriott, "The West Indian Hurricane of September 1–12, 1900," National Geographic II (October 1900): 384–88; Murat Halstead, Galveston: The Horrors of a Stricken City (Chicago 1900).

² "The Future is Ours," Galveston Tribune, Wednesday, September 12, 1900; and Galveston Daily News, (September 14, 1900); Hereafter, GDN.

³ The Engineering Record, Vol. 42, No. 12, (September 22, 1900), p. 267
fear of similar storms in subsequent years sent leaders searching for ways to guarantee the city’s safety.

The eventual solution—constructing a seawall and elevating the city’s height above sea level (the so-called grade-raising)—testified to a great faith in modern technology and an equal resolve to remain on an unprotected sandbar. The city would not only rebuild, leaders decided, but also refashion itself in such a way as to eliminate dangers of disaster. Crucial to this reconstruction were a powerful sea wall that would barricade the land from the pounding of a storm-driven sea and a city-wide grade elevation that would literally raise the surface of the island, an extraordinary proposal to pull land from the sea for a bulwark against nature. The scope of Galveston’s grade-raising, even more than its sea wall, was an unprecedented plan of environmental modification by and for the island’s inhabitants. Both of these construction projects were extensively documented by local photographers. Paul Verkin’s surviving photographs of the grade-raising, illustrating the vessels employed as well as the mechanics of the process, reveal the truly radical nature of this undertaking.

The idea of building a sea wall to protect portions of Galveston Island was not new. All kinds of barricades—dikes, levees, or berms—were standard engineering methods used to protect vulnerable shorelines and riverbanks. Damage caused by a severe hurricane in 1875 prompted discussions of building such a structure, but Galvestonians were unwilling to pay for the project themselves and unable to convince the state legislature to fund the work in the interests of regional commerce. In 1878 salt cedars were planted along the old dune line in an effort to accumulate sand and to form a natural barrier to waves and rising water.4 After

another storm in 1886 destroyed the Gulf community of Indianola, further
southwest on the Texas coast, a group of thirty Galveston businessmen formed the
Progressive Association and issued a public resolution calling for the construction
of a sea wall. This group lobbied the state legislature and secured passage of an
amendment to the city charter that authorized issuance of bonds to fund protective
works. In addition, the group contacted James B. Eads, an engineer famous for
improvements to the mouth of the Mississippi, who submitted a plan for a twelve-
foot embankment. A bond issue met with fierce resistance, and the island lapsed
into a false sense of security as the years passed with no storm damage. On
September 1, 1900, with eerie prescience, Colonel H. M. Robert, Divisional
Engineer of the U.S. Army and author of the famous Robert's Rules of Order,
presented to Galveston City Council a plan for the "improvement, protection, and
development of Galveston Harbor" that included construction of a dike "that would
form a wall diverting the heavy storm tides from the northeast and thus protect
Galveston from overflow." On September 16, 1900—only eight days after the
storm—David Hall, "one of the creditors of the city," wrote the Daily News to
advocate the building of a sea wall. By September 28, 1900, the New York
Herald had published suggestions for Galveston’s safety that included a seawall, a
day-time Galveston for business on the present site and a night-time Galveston for
sleeping on the mainland, rebuilding the city on steel or wooden piles as a "modern
Venice," consolidation with Houston, or complete removal of the city to Port
Arthur, Sabine Pass, or Aransas. One of the most creative suggestions came from

5 Ibid., p. 238.
6 GDN, Sept. 1, 1900.
7 GDN, Sept. 16, 1900.
France, where a colonel in the artillery advocated “a plan to erect a battery for destroying hurricanes close to Galveston... If a West Indian cyclone approached he would fire at it and... break its back.”

But the burdens of storm recovery stretched the city’s resources to the utmost. Besides pressing demands for food, shelter, and medical care for the storm’s survivors, the entire urban infrastructure lay in ruins, and leaders had no way of knowing whether the harbor or the channel had been irreparably harmed. Loss of essential port facilities or of access to Gulf waters would threaten Galveston’s livelihood and cast doubt upon the town’s chances for recovery. In late September a board of inquiry composed of federal engineers was appointed to inspect and report on damage to the jetties and fortifications. Their reassuring findings and the subsequent reopening of the port to restricted traffic three weeks after the storm suggested the possibility of complete recovery but left unanswered questions about future protection. In addition, the city of Houston to the north welcomed an opportunity to challenge Galveston’s supremacy as Texas’s leading port. Faced with the exigencies of storm recovery—ongoing relief requirements, crushing bonded indebtedness, a decimated tax base, and demands for the resumption of city services—some local businessmen, led by the Deep Water Committee, began to call for the overhaul of city government. City leaders hoped that completely changing the city’s governmental structure would persuade public and private powerbrokers to help the city issue bonds and obtain state aid for rebuilding the city—public support that would not be forthcoming under the


9 *GDN*, Sept. 25, 1900.

10 *GDN*, Sept. 28, 1900.
existing city administration. Attracted by reformers’ claims about the commission form of government, prominent professionals and businessmen in Galveston believed that changing to such an organizational arrangement would guarantee higher standards of administration, limit corruption, reassure investors, and rebuild the community as quickly and efficiently as possible. To that end, city leaders drafted a new city charter based on a commission structure, organized local support, and lobbied state legislators to pass their program. The bill granting a new charter to Galveston with a commission form of government was introduced into the legislature on January 30, 1901, and became law on July 7 of that year. The city commission took charge of the municipal government on September 18, 1901.

Once installed, the new commissioners, appointed by Governor J. D. Sayers, moved quickly to develop long-term plans for the island’s safety. On September 25, 1901, a resolution was passed to appoint a committee charged with selecting competent engineers to report on protection plans for the city. On November 20, based on recommendations from the committee, the city commission appointed a board of engineers composed of General H. M. Robert, Alfred Noble, and H. C. Ripley to plan protection for the island. The engineers were instructed to develop “plans and specifications with estimates of the cost: First, for the safest and most efficient way of protecting said City against overflows from the Sea. Second:


for elevating, filling and grading the avenues, streets, side-walks, alleys and lots of
said City. . . and to secure sufficient elevation for drainage and sewerage [and]
Third, For a breakwater or seawall of sufficient strength and height to prevent the
overflow of and damage to said City from the Gulf.”
During storms, the island faced flooding from both the Gulf of Mexico to the southeast and its channel to
Galveston Bay on the northwest. Any protective measure had to address rising
waters on either side of the narrow landmass.

On January 25, 1902, the engineers submitted their report. In it, they
described original grading surveys initiated in 1875, outlined conditions under
which the island regularly flooded, and offered anecdotal evidence as to the heights
of each of these floods. While significant portions of the island remained above the
high waters sustained during most storms, the engineers concluded that “it is only
during phenomenal storms that the City is completely or to a great extent
submerged” and proceeded to list seven such storms in the previous seventy years.
In addition to the vast influx of floodwaters that accompanied such storms, the
consultants found “the direction of the currents at different stages of the overflow
vary greatly throughout the city.” It was this wave action, in conjunction with the
absolute increase in water volume, that was responsible for the horrendous
destruction visited upon the island in 1900. The engineers concluded that
“[p]rotection from storms is not only required for the preservation of life and
property, but also . . . to give confidence to the people of Galveston and to others
who may be drawn here by business interests, in the absolute safety of the city
against the recurrence of such catastrophes as the one of 1900. The Board is of the

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13 Galveston County Board of Engineers Records, Rosenberg Library, Galveston,
Texas, 73-0371, Folder 34-0021, Reports to the Galveston County Commissioners
opinion that it is practicable, at an expense not large, compared with the results obtained, to place Galveston entirely out of the reach of any storm like those from which she suffered previous to 1900 . . . and at the same time make the city safe from any serious damage from water in a storm like the one of 1900."

The report continued,

To accomplish these objects the Board would propose . . . the building of a solid concrete wall, over three miles long . . . the top of this wall to be 17 feet above mean lowwater, or 1.3 feet higher than the highest point reached by the water in the storm of 1900. Second: The raising of the city grade. . . Third: The making of an embankment on top of this fill adjacent to the wall . . . .

The engineers proposed a system whose three components worked together to prevent wave and water damage associated with periodic hurricanes that ravaged the city. The raising of the city grade was necessary to get the streets and lots sufficiently high for safety to life and property "in severe storms. The seawall was necessary to protect this filling from the force of the waves." They went on to stress the importance of the filling. "The filling proposed is to be made over the city, together with the embankment immediately behind the seawall, is hardly less indispensable than the seawall itself. It places the entire city area above the height of ordinary floods."  

In matters of expense, the advisors calculated unit prices and total costs. The seawall was determined to cost $66.50 a linear foot. With engineering fees and contingencies added, Galveston could have its bulwark for $1,294,755. The grade-

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14Ibid., p. 3 (first quotation); p. 5 (second quotation); p. 9 (third quotation); p. 10 (fourth quotation); p. 11 (fifth quotation); p. 16 (sixth quotation).
raising, the second component of the plan, was determined to require 13,873,000 cubic yards of fill costing $.10 a yard. After adding expenses of paving and soiling at $7.50 a linear foot, projected costs for raising large sections of the island were $2,210,285. "Total cost of entire project recommended by the Board, $3,505,040, or say, $3,500,000."15

Galveston residents were more than willing to accept the advice and recommendation of these engineers. Besides possessing a genuine desire to rebuild their city, islanders had great faith in the expertise of the committee called upon to solve their problems. Robert, Ripley, and Noble were prominent members of a growing class of urban planning professionals. Robert and Ripley were both retired from the Army Corps of Engineers, were familiar with or had served for many years in Galveston, and had worked throughout the Galveston District. Alfred Noble was an engineer as well and was then serving as president of the American Society of Civil Engineers. Such experts in technology held great status within the Progressive movement as possessors of highly specialized knowledge whose employment could lead to the creation of safer, healthier, and more beautiful urban environments. They were believed to be above petty politics and to be focused upon making cities less hostile to their inhabitants.16

Public and private support for the proposal was quickly forthcoming. Financing was another question. The new city commissioners had allowed the city to default on $17,500 worth of forty-year bonds issued in 1881. Negotiations with bondholders resulted in the lowering of interest rates on remaining outstanding

15 Ibid., p. 22.

issues. But given the decimation of the tax base, the existing bonded indebtedness, a new and untried government, and the size of the bond issue required, Galveston could not issue bonds to cover the combined construction of the sea wall and grade-raising. Contemporary accounts of this period make no mention of the city’s bonded indebtedness problem but claim overriding community support for underwriting the costs. Using as evidence the amount of taxes paid to the county by residents of Galveston, city and county commissioners reached an agreement whereby the county would issue bonds for sea wall construction and the city would finance the grade-raising. Before the bonds for sea wall construction could be issued, however, consent of two-thirds of the taxpayers of the entire county was necessary. By the time the county’s request for a $1,500,000 issue came to a vote, 84 percent of the bonds’ purchase price had been pledged. With a 98 percent turnout, the bond issue authorization passed 3,119 to 22. In addition, the twenty-seventh Texas State Legislature donated, for grade-raising purposes, two years’ worth of the city’s ad valorem taxes and a portion of the occupation and poll taxes. The following session of the legislature extended the period of donation to fifteen years.

With financing secured, Galveston County proceeded with plans and construction of the first segment of the sea wall. Technology for such building was well-known and similar methods had been used in constructing river levees and protective walls for other shoreside cities. Work progressed quickly. Specifications


18 For necessity of bond election, *GDN*, September 1, 1904, election returns and tax rebates by legislature, *GDN*, March 23, 1902; “Memorial of the City of Galveston to the Democratic State Convention at Galveston, July 15, 1902 and to the Twenty-Eighth Legislature of the State of Texas,” Texas Book Collection, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library.
for the sea wall were published in June 1902, the construction contract was let to J. M. O'Rourke and Company in September, and the first pile was driven on October 28, 1902. The city's grade-raising efforts proceeded along a slightly different path. Successful court challenges to state statutes authorizing the new city commission required the city to provide for the popular election of, rather than gubernatorial appointment of, city commissioners. Amendments to the city charter also specified that the governor appoint "three resident citizens . . . to constitute a board for the management, control and direction of the work of filling and raising the avenues, streets, sidewalks, alleys, lots and outlots in said city, and to make all expenditures of funds for that purpose." Each expenditure had to be approved by the Board of Commissioners, and each member of the Grade-raising Board—as the board of administrators was called—was required to take an oath of office and provide a $5000 bond "for the faithful performance of his duties." Terms of office were not to exceed two years or extend beyond completion of the work. For their services, members of the board would receive $500 paid by the city.¹⁹

On May 15, 1903, Governor Frederick G. Lanham announced the appointments of Captain J. P. Alvey, John Sealy, and E. R. Cheesborough. All three men had been active in Galveston business and politics for many years. Alvey was then general manager of the Texas Guarantee and Trust Company and a member of the Texas Land and Loan Company and the school board. John Sealy, scion of a prominent Galveston family, was a member of the banking firm of Hutchings, Sealy and Company, president of the Galveston Wharf Company, and an officer of many other local institutions. Edmund R. Cheesborough was the youngest of the board of managers but equally well considered. As secretary of the

¹⁹ *GDN*, May 16, 1903.
Blum Land Company and secretary-treasurer of the Texas Cement Company, he brought strong administrative talents to the body. Moreover, he had been heavily involved in founding the Galveston Good Government Club, having written the New York City Good Government organization in 1894 about establishing such a group in the island city. He brought credibility and integrity to the grade-raising effort and quickly assumed responsibility for administering the massive project.

Once the Grade-raising Board was in place, events proceeded apace. In June 1903 the board recommended the issuance of $2,000,000 in grade-raising bonds and hired a supervising engineer for the project, Captain Charles S. Riché, another former Corps of Engineers Galveston District Engineer. A survey of the parts of the island to be filled was begun in July, and by September the board and county and city commissioners agreed to advertise jointly for bids for sixty days and then enter into separate contracts for the filling of the sea wall right of way (a county jurisdiction) and the rest of the island (a city purview). Representatives of the county agreed to pay the contractor all cash, and the city contracted to pay one-third in cash and two-thirds in 5 percent grade-raising bonds unless the payment of all cash would secure a lower price. Final specifications for the grade-raising were completed September 15, 1903, and bid solicitations were placed in appropriate publications throughout the United States at the beginning of October.

As specified, the bid requested proposals to “raise the grade of the City of Galveston” for four particular areas. Division A was bounded on the north by the

\[20\text{Ibid.}\]

\[21\text{Rice, “The Galveston Plan,” p. 369.}\]

\[22\text{For the issuance of bonds, see GDN, June 17, 1903; for the hiring of Riché, see GDN, June 20, 1903; for survey, see GDN, July 9, 1903; for bidding and payment schedule, see GDN, September 11, 1903.}\]
south side of Avenue A (now Harborside Drive), on the east and the south by the
sea wall right-of-way and on the west by the western side of Thirteenth Street.
Division B lay to the southwest of A, confined to the north by the northern side of
Broadway, to the east by the western side of Thirteenth Street, to the south by the
sea wall right-of-way, and to the west by the eastern side of Thirty-second Street.
Division C moved further westward, bumping into property controlled by the
federal government. It was bordered on the north by the northern line of Broadway,
on the east by the eastern side of Thirty-Second Street, on the south by the sea wall
right-of-way, and on the west by the “boundary of the general area to be filled as
described.” The fourth and final area to be filled was the space “... from the rear
face of the concrete portion of the sea wall towards the city to the boundary of the
sea wall right-of-way.”

By the 2 P.M. deadline on December 7, 1903, only two bids for the work
had been received. Nevertheless, the proposals were opened and after some
consultation the contracts were awarded on December 12, 1903, to the firm of
Goedhart and Bates of New York. The plan outlined by P. C. Goedhart and Lindon
Bates was bold. Dredge material would be taken from Galveston Bay by self-
loading and discharging, self-propelled hopper dredges that would then steam
through a distribution canal “to pipe line stations and discharge their loads through
pipes running down the streets and avenues.” This canal would “parallel the sea
wall... inside the wall and the city... The earth taken from the canal... placed
on the sea wall right of way, and when the contract [had] been complied with the
dredges [would] back out of the canal, filling it up firmly behind them...”

23 “Advertisement, Instructions, Specifications and Proposal for Grade Raising
Galveston, Texas,” E. R. Cheesborough papers, 22-0024, Box 1, folder 1. Texas
History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston Texas; hereafter ERC papers.
sea wall right-of-way, controlled by the county commissioners court, was to be filled within twelve months from February 18, 1904, and the raising of the city was to be completed by that date in 1907.24

The authors of this plan could claim great authority for such work. P. C. Goedhart was the senior member of the Goedhart Brothers engineering firm of Dusseldorf, Germany. That company had worked in the harbors of Dusseldorf, Neuss, Danzig, and Kiel, as well as in the Dortmund-Ems and Amsterdam-Rhine canals. Lindon Bates was the American partner of the firm Goedhart and Bates of New York, inventor of a system of high-powered hydraulic dredges, and had been engaged in the design and implementation of harbor improvements for numerous nations—the United States, Belgium, Egypt, Australia, and India, among others. He had also been involved in the construction of shipping terminals at Kansas City, Missouri; Portland, Oregon; Seattle and Tacoma, Washington; and of the drainage canal at Chicago.25 Interestingly, the only comparable effort to fill and raise an existing urban area was the grade-raising of some parts of Chicago in the mid-nineteenth century.

What appeared to be a reasonably straightforward plan required a monumental administrative effort. Early in the planning process, city leaders had agreed that the city would be responsible for raising streets, trolley lines, gas, water and sewer pipelines and whatever other municipal service properties lay in the areas to be raised as well as for providing the fill for the rest of the process. Private property owners would be responsible for the raising of their improvements, i. e.,


houses, barns, stables, and any other structures located on the blocks to be raised. Excavating a canal so that the dredges could transport fill material necessitated another kind of negotiation with private property owners. The canal route ran parallel to the sea wall and also required a turning basin so that the dredges could discharge their fill and return to gulf waters to reload. (See map.) In order to acquire the land for the canal right-of-way, the city agreed to lease the necessary lots from their respective owners, paying as rental fees the taxes covered by the period of the lease. At no cost to the property owner, the contractors moved any improvements from the property to sites provided by the city for that purpose. Once the grade-raising was completed and the canal filled, the structures would be returned to their original locations and placed on the newly raised lots. The Galveston *Daily News* minimized the expense and inconvenience. "[A]ll the property owner has to do is loan the city the use of his lot and permit the city to move his house to another lot while the grade-raising project is under way and replace the house on the original property after the grade of same has been raised."

The author went on to assure homeowners not in the path of the canal that the costs of raising their houses would not be excessive. "[T]he cost to the individual property owner will be small. In fact, it is said the cost of this work . . . will be reduced to a minimum, and an assurance has been given that the people of Galveston shall not be made victims of any monopoly or be compelled to pay exorbitant prices for the work . . . competition will be so great . . . that the cost of moving [or raising] houses will be reduced to the lowest notch; that even the humblest commissary house owner will be able to meet the expense and thus

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Galveston and Vicinity, Showing the Temporary Canal and Area to be Filled.
participate in the enhanced valuation of real estate in Galveston."

Some residents remained skeptical. "I don’t think that I have to raise the house very much" wrote Victoria W. Campbell to her daughter, "as our lot is higher than the adjoining places. but [sic] nobody can tell how it will turn out." By November 1904 Mrs. Campbell was fearful. "When the grade-raising reaches us I may be obliged to have the house raised a foot or two—and that will cost lots of money." Homeowners reluctant to raise their dwellings could fill in basements or first floors. Instead of raising their house, Charles and Florence Vedder removed partitions and flooring from the basement and build an addition onto their home at 35th Street and Avenue O when the grade-raising reached their neighborhood.

Those unwilling to lease property to the city for the canal right of way or contemplating a holdout for better terms received a warning from "a member of the board" through the Galveston Daily News. "The board has determined that no discrimination shall be practiced. The terms of the city are fair, equitable and just . . . . If any are holding out . . . they will be disappointed, as the board will have the city condemn the property of every obstructionist before submitting to any unreasonable demand." Replying to C. C. Pettit in Dickinson, Texas, who refused to sign a lease because of what he perceived to be a mistaken appraisal in

27 GDN, December 17, 1903.

28 Victoria W. Campbell to her daughter Alice, October 29, 1904 (first quotation), November 8, 1904, (second quotation), 79-0029, Box 1, folder 4, Campbell Family Papers, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

29 Katherine Pauls, Florence M. Vedder, 1861-1934 (Houston: K&R Reproductions, 1970), p. 99. This is a biography, privately printed, in possession of the author. At least one other copy is available through the Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library.

30 The "board member" was almost certainly E. R. Cheesborough. GDN, January 9, 1904.
1893, Captain J. P. Alvey, chairman of the Grade-raising Board, reiterated the board's strategy and suggested a certain level of frustration with those unwilling to comply with the board's requests.

What took place eleven years ago . . . is history . . . We have no control over the city government; our duty is . . . the raising of the grade . . . . We have found in a few instances some parties attempting to hold up the Board, but in each and every instance, their demands have been made [sic] with a firm refusal. We are treating each and every one alike . . . . I understand that you have been paid for your entire lot and the little piece of ground off of the corner, concerning which we have written you, is practically of no value . . . . I presume that you have about one-fortieth of a lot and that its value can not exceed $10 and if such be the case . . . I personally, would be willing to pay you the $10 and after the grade has been raised give the land back to you as a present. . . . I think that you will hardly believe it fair to hold my Board responsible for the doings of some 'hoodlum' Board of Aldermen. In some instance a person has objected to sign a lease on account of some disagreement with the Relief Committee, another case they had been sued for taxes, another case he had at one time worked for the city and lost his job . . . . I feel sure that if, for no other reason than as a personal favor to me, you will acquiesce in our request. I certainly would dislike very much for you to do otherwise. . . .

Edmund Cheesborough was responsible for the bulk of leases.

Corresponding directly with property owners or working through local realtors with information supplied by the tax assessor-collector, he eventually obtained 284 leases to lots in the canal right of way. He argued convincingly for the grade-


32 E. R. Cheesborough to Mayor and City Commissioners, March 10, 1904, ERC papers, letterpress book 2, p 321.
raising, appealing to property owner's patriotic duty (as "a progressive citizen") and financial interest ("worth easily double its present value") in the same breath and always assumed agreement with his cause ("thanking you in advance"). Female property owners were subject to the same tactics, but, in at least one case, Cheesborough sent the lease in care of a male acquaintance, "a gentleman in whom we understand you have every confidence" and who had "assured the Grade-raising Board of his friendly co-operation..." As fewer and fewer leases were outstanding, he chivied the realtors to complete their tasks and account for missing agreements. In a letter sent February 3, 1904, Cheesborough inquired of John Adriance the status of eleven leases yet to be obtained for the canal right-of-way, "all of the above being located within your territory."

By February 1904 Cheesborough was urging representatives of Goedhart and Bates to begin moving improvements from the canal right-of-way so that residents would understand that the project was underway and would begin raising their improvements prior to filling. In other matters, permission was secured from the U. S. Engineering Department to cut the jetty at Eighth Street for the canal, and the federal government passed legislation and appropriations to extend the sea wall from Thirty-ninth Street "to the end of the Government reservations at Fifty-third Street." In the report sent to Governor Lanham in June, the board

33 Letters to Mr. Joseph Wilson, Mr. W. H. Plummer, Mrs. C. E. Shepard and Miss Alice S. Ashton, Mrs. E. J. Evans, ERC papers, letterpress book No. 2, pp. 35, 36, 51, 57.

34 E. R. Cheesborough to John Adriance, Trueheart Family Papers, 22-0023, Box 2, folder 16, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.


36 E. R. Cheesborough to Lindon Bates, April 27, 1904, ERC papers, letterpress
summarized its activities and breathlessly detailed the flurry of getting underway. “The bulk of the houses have been moved from the canal route . . . . About 1000 feet of the canal . . . has been completed. The draw-bridge . . . is almost completed. It is expected within ten days that all preliminaries will be finished. The first hopper-dredge is expected in this City every day; the others will follow in due course . . . . The actual work of filling, will in all probability begin about the 15th day of the present month, and from that time on will be pushed with great vigor.”37

When the dredge Holm arrived June 12, 1904, Cheesborough and the island’s inhabitants expected the grade-raising to move into high gear. “The bridge and funnel on the dredge was first sighted by those at the bathing pavillion a little after 4 o’clock yesterday afternoon,” explained the Daily News in great detail, “. . . the proximity of the little mechanical giant, calculated to play such an important part in the grade-raising operations, was good tidings to the citizens of Galveston.”38 Holm was the smallest of the hopper dredges used in the project. At 150 feet in length, 30 feet wide, and with a draft of 13 feet, she could load 580 cubic yards of dredge material in half an hour and discharge her full capacity in 45 minutes. Containing two engines—350 and 275 horsepower—the dredge was equipped with electric lights and steered by steam.39

The other three dredges, which did not arrive in Galveston until months later, were “of unusual size and capacity and contain features of operation different

book 1, p. 391; see also Custodians of the Coast, p. 244.

37 Report to Governor Lanham, ERC papers, letterpress book 1, p. 450.

38 GDN, June 13, 1904.

39 Ibid.
from those of any dredges heretofore used in the United States."\textsuperscript{40} Built in Europe for conditions much like those found in Galveston, the vessels were unusual because their hoppers could be filled and discharged with a single pump. The \textit{Galveston}, \textit{Leviathan}, and \textit{Texas} could carry three times the amount of the \textit{Holm} and would undertake the bulk of the effort to move from Galveston Bay to the streets of the city the required 11 million cubic yards of fill. The dredges were built in Holland and Germany because American shipyards had never constructed such craft and lacked the skills necessary to build craft of this design.\textsuperscript{41} The European-built dredges were considered ocean-going, but they made such passages at some risk. All of the ship’s machinery, boilers and coal bunkers had to be placed as far aft as possible because of the space required for the hoppers. Never the most graceful of vessels, the dredges crossed the Atlantic with the forward hoppers tightly battened, hoping for calm weather and flat seas. One of them, the \textit{Texas}, went down on December 24, 1904, in a twelve-day gale off the Azores with the loss of 15 men. The remaining crew and officers took to the lifeboats and were rescued after a harrowing 13 days by the Italian brigantine, \textit{Mercedes}, transferred to the steamer \textit{Zeno} and put ashore in Waterford, Ireland.\textsuperscript{42}

Long before her sisters’ arrival in Galveston, the \textit{Holm} began work on the grade-raising canal that was essential to the plan for distributing the fill carried by the dredges. The canal was “100 feet wide on the bottom, with side slopes varying

\textsuperscript{40}“Raising the Grade of Galveston,” p. 284.

\textsuperscript{41}A lively debate arose about the truth of this contention by Goedhart and Bates. See “Letters to the Editor,” \textit{Engineering Record}, Vol. 51, No. 21 (April 29, 1905), p. 612.

\textsuperscript{42}“Texas” steam dredge logbook, 1904, 36-0066, German original, with English translation, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library.
between 2 to 1 and 4 to 1, and has an average depth of 20 ft of water, with a maximum width of 200 ft at the waterline. . . . 43 The canal had to be wide enough for the dredges to pass each other, and the waterway also contained two excavated basins so that the dredges could turn around and return to the Bay for more fill material. The Holm, a hopper dredge, was remarkably unsuited to cutting the canal (its method was to suck material from the bottom, frequently causing the sides to cave in). At first Lindon Bates refused to consider hiring a cutting dredge to assist in digging the canal because he was angry at Chas. Clarke and Company, the local dredging firm, who threatened to oppose the foreign-built dredges. Only the most pointed letters from Cheesborough pushed him to relent. "The Holm is positively not suited for the task of digging the canal . . . . The pipeline used is composed of two kinds of pipe and the leaking is a sight to behold. . . . The work so far has unquestionably been very expensive and is costing your firm a great deal of money. It would have paid you, undoubtedly, thousands of dollars had you contracted with Mess. Clark & Co., or any one else to dig this canal using a dredge with a cutter . . . . The complaint is very bitter (and we are doing everything in our power to pacify the people) at the long delay . . . . We have pacified our citizenship and have controlled the newspapers, but fear we will not be able to continue a much greater time." 44 Bates finally hired Chas. Clarke and Company and the grade-raising moved more rapidly.

Bates's anger was not unfounded. Soon after the arrival of the Holm, Cheesborough wrote to Bates, "I am in receipt of private information which convinces me that Chas. Clark & Co., and the Atlantic, Gulf & Pacific Company,

43 "Raising the Grade of Galveston," p. 284.

have both been doing everything in their power to prevail upon the U.S. Government to prevent the "Holm" from going to work."\textsuperscript{45} Unwilling to appear as local obstructionists, Chas. Clarke & Co. mounted their opposition through "marine interests in the east to oppose the introduction of foreign dredge boats into America."\textsuperscript{46} Understanding that this was a potential obstacle to the grade-raising, Goedhart and Bates had tried to make the dredges as uncontroversial as possible. The boats had been sold to the company's American subsidiary and entered Galveston as American vessels. The basic issue involved violation of the Jones Act, a law passed to protect American shipping and shipbuilding interests that, among other things, prohibited foreign-built vessels from being engaged in coast-wise trade. The city of Galveston and the contractors argued that the activities of dredges and dredging did not constitute "coast-wise trade." National maritime interests believed otherwise, suggesting that the taking of dredge materials from Galveston Bay, the transportation of those materials into the canal, and the subsequent distribution of that material over the island was a form of coastal trade and was therefore included under the law. Legislation introduced in Congress attempted to prohibit such dredging activities by foreign-built craft.\textsuperscript{47} In addition, the opposition sought to have the laws applied retroactively to the Galveston dredges, an action

\textsuperscript{45} ERC to Lindon Bates, June 23, 1904, ERC papers, letterpress 1., p. 473.

\textsuperscript{46} ERC to Lindon Bates, June 30, 1904, ERC papers, papers, letterpress 1., p. 477.

\textsuperscript{47} S. 6318, introduced January 5, 1905, and H.R. 17999, introduced January 19, 1905. The Senate bill was referred to committee and not reported subsequent to that; the House bill was reported out of committee, its passage recommended with an amendment that exempted any "foreign-built dredge . . . now at work." H.R. Report 4591, p. 2432. No further action was taken on either measure. "Statement Concerning the Dredges "Holm [sic]," "Galveston," "Texas II," and "Leviathan," Engaged in Raising the Grade of the City of Galveston," Texas Book Collection, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library., n.d.
that would have meant delays and considerable additional expense. City leaders and the contractors argued that no American dredges could do the job and that the savings resulting from using these particular vessels amounted to $1,500,000.\textsuperscript{48}

With the shifting of the *Holm* to its more suitable filling duties and the subsequent arrival of the *Leviathan*, *Galveston*, and *Texas II* as well as the use of the smaller Dutch dredges *Triton* and *Nereus*, the grade-raising proceeded more quickly. Quarter-mile sections of areas to be raised were enclosed by dikes. Within the encompassed area, all structures, sewers, pipes, trolley tracks, and gas lines were raised. Once everything was lifted precariously in the air, fill was pumped underneath until the grade level met that of the survey requirement. The water flowed out of the pumped material rapidly, and the ground level rose quickly. During the time that fill was being pumped, residents negotiated the neighborhood by way of temporary catwalks and trestles, resulting in what the *Daily News* referred to as “A City on Stilts.”

Galveston . . . claims the distinction of being the only city in the United States that can boast of a system of elevated sidewalks. . . On each side of the various streets are to be found temporary board walks, in many instances nothing more than planks, supported by uprights, the whole being attached to the fences. They have not been built with any regard to conformity to straight lines, and their permanency is a mere question of a few weeks. . . they do not give assurance of safety to corpulently inclined gentlemen, and they are certainly not reassuring to the man with the downtown club habit.\textsuperscript{49}

A reporter attempting to reach the streetcar “found himself trapped. . . Beyond


\textsuperscript{49}*GDN*, April 14, 1905.
was mud and water, and behind him a large discharge pipe was throwing out great quantities of filling. . . a resident . . . with the true Samaritan spirit, directed him to cross the street, walk back upon the elevated sidewalk, pass through a corner grocery and let himself down upon the dike, which led down an intersecting street to the Avenue L car line.”50 Ad hoc arrangements abounded. The reporter noted that one citizen whose property abutted the canal was obliged to tie the cow “to the railing of the back gallery. . . the barnyard fowls are privileged to roost upon the railing of the gallery mentioned and the dog and cat also inhabit that portion of the house. It is in many instances a case of ‘keeping the pig in the parlor’.”51 Florence Vedder remembered a wedding under these circumstances.

The boardwalks, erected for the convenience of homeowners during the grade-raising, were already up, but the fill had not been turned in, so everyone prayed that the wedding day would pass without any complications. But Fate had decreed otherwise, and to the chagrin of the family and friends, the fill began to pour through the pipes about 11 a.m. . . Carriages which were to take the wedding party to Grace Church had to stop . . . two blocks away, and they all walked gingerly down the rickity boardwalks. . . it was all accepted in a spirit of fun. . .52

There were also some advantages to the massive civil engineering project. Vedder recalled that “All the housewives took the opportunity to have a general housecleaning. . . they watched trash, tin cans, broken and discarded objects disappear in the muddy fill and fast hardening sand. . . everyone tossed in so

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Pauls, Florence M. Vedder, p. 100.
called *white elephants* — things they had wanted to get rid of for years. Even the kitchen stove disappeared.”

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the massive filling project was its potential effect on the island’s vegetation. Obviously, any trees and plantings covered by several feet of dredge material would be killed, but even oaks or oleanders lovingly lifted by their owners along with buildings were endangered. Since the fill was 15 to 45 percent sand and the rest salt water, the resulting soil composition was not suited to grow much of anything. The *Daily News* lamented the loss: “As is well known to every one who knows the arboricultural beauty of the city, there are hundred and hundreds of the most beautiful tropical shade and ornamental trees. . . . hundreds, perhaps, of stately palms and wide-branched live oaks . . . . the effect of the salt upon a large percentage of the trees will prove disastrous.” Victoria Campbell wrote her daughter Alice about the problem, “Our old home never looked so sweet desirable[sic] and shady as it does this spring. The house and fence and everything is on stilts which of course is disfiguring, but the palms the elms and Oleanders are simply beautiful it is distressing to know that after the filling is put in the trees will all die and the place will look as desolate as the desert of Arizona.” The Women’s Health Protective Association took the lead in trying to save the trees. Many letters of inquiry were sent to leading botanists and landscape architects throughout the country. A reply received from George E.

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54 Hornaday, p. 503.

55 *GDN*, April 10, 1904.

56 Victoria Campbell to her daughter Alice, November 8, 1904, Campbell family papers 79-0029, Box 1, folder 5, Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library.
Kessler, chief landscape architect for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis, recommended that the trees and shrubs to be saved be moved only once, lifted immediately prior to fill being pumped in and replaced upon completion. He specified the kinds of wagons and tools to use and sent photographs illustrating the process.\(^{57}\) Some residents built protective wooden walls around their trees and raised them using topsoil or dirt from other parts of the island, the mainland, or even overseas. “All up and down Broadway chaos reigns,” wrote Victoria Campbell, “people are digging dirt from esplanades and street to fill their yards rather than have the sand...” Dr. Randall, a neighbor of the Campbells, “has raised about eight feet and is filling his yard himself with South American soil mostly it comes to Galveston as ballast...”\(^{58}\) Even the city tried to mitigate the damage. Where street surface soil was “of a loamy substance or well compacted earth,” it was to be scraped off and deposited at intersections to be put back over the newly graded thoroughfares.\(^{59}\) Most of the live oaks, oleanders, and tropical vegetation on the east end of the island today date to replacement efforts after the storm and grade-raising. Once the salt leached out of the dredge material, the soil proved to be quite fertile and capable of sustaining all manner of tropical vegetation.\(^{60}\)

In all, 2,156 structures of various kinds were raised during the course of the

\(^{57}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{58}\) Victoria Campbell to her daughter, Alice, May 8, 1905, first quotation; Victoria Campbell to her daughter, Alice, October 29, 1904, second quotation; Campbell family papers 79-0029, Box 1, folders 4 and 5.

\(^{59}\) ERC to V. E. Austin, June 13, 1904, ERC papers, letterpress book 1, p. 466.

The most spectacular of these was St. Patrick's church, one of the largest churches in the city at that time. Located at Thirty-fourth Street and Avenue K, it measured 53 feet by 140 feet and was estimated to weigh approximately 3,000 tons, its tower alone accounting for 1,400 tons. The church was lifted from its foundation by excavation underneath and placed in a cradle of heavy timbers and iron girders. Seven hundred jackscrews were then distributed under the cradle and the structure very slowly and carefully raised five feet. "Owing to the nature of the construction of this building," wrote the Daily News, "fears were entertained as to the feasibility of raising it. It is virtually a big brick shell with the exception of the solidly constructed tower." The paper went on to observe: "No accidents occurred during the operation and services have never been discontinued while the raising was in progress. On St. Patrick's Day, March 17, a record-breaking congregation attended the services while the church was elevated high in the air."62

Work continued, slowly and steadily, for years. By September 26, 1906, the halfway mark had been reached, but in February of 1907, the contractors requested and received a three-year extension on the time for completion. In 1910 North American Dredging Company took over the contract and pumped sand from Offat's Bayou to finish the work. Goedhart and Bates claimed to have lost $400,000 on the project, but they received the praises of a grateful city. When the work was over in 1911, five hundred blocks had been filled with 16,300,000 cubic yards of sand. Other parts of the island have been filled as development has moved west, but nothing has been done of the magnitude of this initial effort.

The sea wall and grade-raising were tested periodically during this time. A

61 McComb, Galveston, p. 142.

62 GDN, April 7, 1907, article accompanied by Verkin photograph.
hurricane in 1909 caused some scouring and deterioration of the sea wall and necessitated repairs and modifications recommended by General Robert. But the greatest test of both efforts came on August 17, 1915, when a storm comparable to the 1900 hurricane hit the island. The storm passed just south of Galveston, and while the barometric readings remained higher than those taken in 1900 (28.63 inches versus 28.42), the tide was half a foot higher. The highest windspeed was 93 mph at 2:37 A.M. on August 17, and hurricane force winds continued on the island for 19 hours. The highest windspeed documented in 1900 was 84 mph, but the anemometer blew away; officials estimated winds reached 120 mph before the end of the storm. Meterologists in 1915 calculated that the storms “were of about equal intensity.”63 Results of the storm, fortunately, were not.

“Great Hurricane Sweeps Texas Coast; Galveston Seawall Again Paramount,” read the headline in the Daily News on August 17. “Subjected to a test that could hardly have been more terrific, the great Galveston seawall again was tried and found not wanting. Against the battering of giant seas it stood stanchly [sic] throughout every foot of its five miles.”64 “The sea-wall at Galveston, Tex., was the city’s salvation during the hurricane of Aug. 16-17. This is the outstanding feature, from the engineering viewpoint, of the effect of the recent storm,” reported the Engineering Record.65 Engineering News was no less convinced. “Thanks to the precautions in the way of seawall and grade elevation taken subsequent to the disastrous storm of 1900, the loss of life and damage to property was


64. GDN, August 17, 1915.

comparatively small in the city..." Their correspondent, R. P. Babbitt, was even more congratulatory: "Had it not been for the seawall there would now be only a heap of ruins to mark the site of this great Texas seaport. This magnificent wall, extending... along the Gulf front of the city, was impregnable to the fury of the waves which beat against it but were baffled at every point." All of this tribute notwithstanding, portions of the wall were undermined, its concrete sidewalk seriously damaged, and areas of backfilling washed away. The greatest storm damage befell the causeway connecting Galveston to the mainland. Completed in 1912, the approaches to the 2,455 feet of reinforced concrete viaduct were washed out, and the main carrying the city's water supply was also destroyed. But the loss of life and property experienced in 1900 was not repeated, and urban engineers and planners might be forgiven a little self-satisfaction.

Amid the chaos in the wake of the Galveston storm of Aug. 17 one structure stands out in bold[sic] relief, a monument to engineering skill and foresight—the seawall... Galveston’s seawall was the city’s salvation, and to the engineers who designed it and to the contractors who built it the Texas town owes debt of gratitude which can never be adequately repaid... It takes a catastrophe like the Galveston storm to demonstrate to a public, often forgetful of those to whom it owes its safety, that the civil engineer is the foundationstone upon which the physical welfare of cities must be built... City officials... may well ponder over the Galveston lesson and take inventory of their own state of preparedness against unforeseen catastrophes which engineers can


aid them in preventing. 68

Citizens in the city felt secure enough after the storm to send a telegram to the Associated Press refusing any form of relief and expressing their profound thanks "in this triumphant battle with the elements that similar assistance [as that offered in 1900] is unnecessary." They went on to "assure friends and admirers everywhere of this sincere pledge to strive diligently and heartily to attain that superior success which last night's victory promises for the community." 69 The seawall, a visible and formidable construction separating land and sea, received the bulk of the credit for preserving the city. The grade-raising, largely completed and invisible by 1915, was no less a factor in the city's survival.

Paul Verkin was one of the many local photographers who captured the unique experience of living on Galveston Island during these major civil engineering projects. His work appeared in the Galveston Daily News, in illustrated materials prepared for the grade-raising bond issue, and in city and port promotional materials. 70 The collections holding his work possess hundreds of images taken by his studio at this time. The twelve images of the grade-raising considered here are both representative of the larger collection and especially revealing of the unique nature of this endeavor. All of the photographs are glass


69 GDN, August 17, 1915.

70 For Verkins in the GDN, see "St. Patrick's Church Raised Five Feet," April 7, 1907, Contemporary usage of Verkin work often appeared without attribution. Today, images taken by the Verkin studio and held by archives are frequently attributed to those archives when used for publication. Putative Verkin images may be found in publications by the Galveston Corps of Engineers, the Galveston Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Port of Galveston.
plate negatives owned by either the Peabody Essex Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, or The Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, and copyrighted by those institutions. All of the images may be considered landscapes of a built environment. They consist of wide views of sites, individuals, and objects taken out of doors in natural lighting, and all of them have a horizontal orientation. Five of them (V-2720, CN08160, CN08161, CN08172, and CN08173) include people within their composition, although those individuals included are not the primary subjects of the images. Like the rest of the photographs considered here, these are black and white, candid visual representations of particular subject matter taken chiefly for commercial reasons. The images are technically excellent, the subjects clearly in focus, compositions conventional and understandable. Prints made directly from the negatives require no cropping or modification for improvement.

The story of the grade-raising provides an interpretive framework for the images, a basic way of attaching meaning to the pictures, of understanding what is transpiring. Within this context, the images document the events described above—the dredges, some of the individuals involved, and the mechanics of the process. Structures of various kinds appear in all of the images, but two prominent island establishments are primary subjects, St. Patrick’s Church on Thirty-fifth Street (CN08154), whose raising is described above, and the Letitia Rosenberg Home for Women (V-157), a charitable organization housed in an imposing building on Twenty-fifth Street. The St. Patrick’s photograph was used at least once in the Galveston Daily News to illustrate a story of the church’s raising, and other evidence suggests that these images, as well as a closer view of the lifting process, may have been used as advertisements for a house raising firm. 71 As architectural

71 Ibid., see Verkin index for other Egert House Mover image citations.
photographs, the images are completely traditional in their presentation of perspective and angle of view. They are the most straightforward of building pictures, taken of the entire structure, uninterested in architectural detail. Captured by the photographer from the street, the lighting is bright and prints from the negatives produce high contrast images with little subtlety. Their horizontal composition suggests the heaviness of the buildings; the foundations spread across the lower portion of the image, their massive weight bearing down upon the bottom of the frame. At first glance, the buildings, like the photographs, are interesting but unremarkable. Only upon closer inspection does the incongruity of the situation become apparent to a careful viewer. Both large buildings are perched on screwjacks and timber joists, awaiting dredge fill material.

Clearly, these particular images function in a primarily documentary fashion. They are photographs of important local institutions that were part of the grade-raising process. But someone unfamiliar with their context is immediately intrigued. Why are these buildings suspended over the ground? The “how” is at least implied—these images document in detail the method by which one might get an immense edifice five feet into the air—but there is nothing to indicate why such an action would be taken. Little in the images suggests when they were taken. There are no people, automobiles, or other objects that might indicate a year or time period. An individual familiar with the buildings or the island might be able to guess from the size of trees or the presence or absence of other structures when the buildings were lifted, but a general observer would not be able to date the photographs. There are no markings on the negatives that might specify time or place. What could make a citizenry lift thousands of tons of buildings? The novelty compels further investigation.

Taken as independent, ahistorical representations, these highly evocative
images invite broader interpretation. At once very conventional, traditional, black and white documentation, their extraordinary content opens the door to wider, even whimsical, speculation. They seem to challenge assumptions about large buildings and the organizations that they may house. While not exactly weightless, the structures exhibit a mobility not usually seen in bricks and mortar. Still, their levitation is strictly controlled; they do not explode randomly or come apart when wrenched from their foundations. What larger statement might these photographs make about the flexibility of institutions, their abilities to depart from the predictable, to “rise above” constraints?

Another image (CN08172) reveals a closer view of a raised building foundation. (Surrounding negatives within the collection suggest that this is Grace Episcopal Church, located on Thirty-sixth Street.) The screwjacks and joists are even more obvious; the photographer is at ground level, looking up at the structure and the men engaged in its raising. A natural companion image for the other wider, full building views, this foundation shot shows in greater detail the tools for the process as well as the individuals engaged in the task. Those people are comfortable in their places, relaxed, proud of their accomplishment, most standing on joists extending from the raised edifice. The high contrast nature of the negative and its resulting print makes the area under the church appear black and eliminates any view of the jacks and timbers actually under the building. More than the two complete building views, this edifice floats over the ground, suspended, carrying the men responsible for its flight. Can their weight be the only thing keeping the building from floating out of the picture entirely?

Four of the images are street/canal scenes (V-2720, CN08160, CN08173, and CN08161). They support the narrative above describing the experience of living with the grade-raising on a daily basis. Image V-2720 captures the process in
a nutshell. Taken looking forward from the stern of the Holm, the photographer
was on the bank of the canal and the resulting view encompasses canal and street,
ship and structure. An unusual aspect of the image is the utter lack of attention paid
to the dredge by individuals within the picture. A man leads two children along the
bank and groups converse, seemingly oblivious to the activity in the foreground. A
few individuals observe from a distance and two men in a small dinghy tend the
vessel, but there is little to suggest any process out of the ordinary. The infamous
temporary boardwalks and system of catwalks appear to be the subject of
CN08161, mobility hampered by muddy water and circumscribed egress. They
support the information that different neighborhoods required varying amounts of
fill, the area of houses on stilts obviously faced with massive pumping. The other
streets are less impassable, their raising more limited in scope. Unlike the large
brick structures discussed above, these buildings are modest, private dwellings of
wooden frame construction. These images are more human in scale, in contrast
with the earlier wide views of major institutions. The pictures document residential
neighborhoods coping with this huge project. Two views (CN08173, CN08160)
show the discharge pipes themselves and are a wealth of practical information. The
pictures illustrate how the pipes were placed in the streets, the periodic, spare pipes
placed to secure the piping that is being used and to provide rudimentary, albeit
risky, crosswalks, and the leaking documented numerous times by Cheesborough
in his correspondence with Lindon Bates. They are shown disgorging cubic
yards of sand and salt water, watched by children and monitored by adults,
controlled by valves on the ends of the pipes.

Besides documenting the piping process, these images capture in

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72 Multiple references in letterpress 1 and 2, see esp. ERC to Lindon Bates,
microcosm the larger relationship between Galveston Island and the sea. Simultaneously attempting to protect themselves and to control the water's destructive capability, the people of the island watch and respond to its force. They lift their houses above its path, take from it the dredge material to raise the island out of harm's way, and sift that land from the salt water, direct its placement, and all the while constantly monitor the process. The sea wall and grade-raising demonstrated a certain degree of hubris—a refusal by the population to move from the exposed sandbar, a faith in engineering and technology to make the island safe, and a determination to implement whatever was necessary to remain. Residents of Galveston knew that the coexistence of land and sea was an uneasy one.

Children watch the activity in CN08160, so captivated that they ignore the photographer at work. The man on the porch and the man working a valve (somewhat hidden by a board) in CN08173 know that the activity before them—not the photographer—demands their close attention. Interacting with so mercurial a force requires constant vigilance.

The dredge pipe is the focal point of these two images (CN08160 and CN 08173). Both the composition of the pictures and the individuals captured in the photographs direct the viewer's eye to the pipe. In CN08160, the dredge pipe moves from left to right across the center of the picture. If that placement does not draw the viewer's eye, then the focus of the people in the photograph on the pipe should. The individuals in this image are spread almost completely across the frame, six of the seven oriented to the right, attentive to the pipe. In CN08173 it appears almost centered on the horizon. The receding perspective of the houses and the street focus the eye on the dark pipe as it emerges from over the horizon and moves into the foreground, cutting sharply from left to right and downward across the image. The only implied motion in these still photographs comes from the
water, in the blurriness of the spray and in rippling pond-like areas. Objects and individuals nearby are reactive, warily responsive to the water’s movement. Like a modern sea monster, Gulf waters prowl these neighborhoods encased in pipe, combined with sand. In a final irony, they continue to destroy, killing by burial and salt content what had earlier not been annihilated by wind and wave.

Perhaps the most interesting and compelling images are those of the ships in the dredging canal (V-2718, V-2721, V-2725, V-2728, and CN08174). Verkin loved to photograph watercraft of any kind, and these must have been a special treat. Unlike any other dredges used in this country, these custom-made hopper dredges were crucial to the success of the project. They had far greater capacity than any American dredges and were specifically designed to transport dredge materials, not simply pipe material from an area and discharge it nearby. All of the dredges were built in Kinderdijk, Holland, and claimed New York as their homeport. At least three of these photos were taken near the eastern end of the dredging canal, offering visual verification of its location. Holm appears to have just entered the canal through the cut in the jetties (V-2718) and is proceeding past St. Mary’s Infirmary parallel to the seawall. A closer view of the Holm in the same surroundings (V-2721) suggests the contrast between the relatively sleek lines of the boat and the static, heavy buildings immediately behind it. The dredge is considerably more suited to this landscape than the structures. The mechanistic nature of the project is effectively captured in V-2728. Four of the dredges recede back into the canal, evenly spaced and engaged with factory-like efficiency in the task at hand. Close examination of V-2725 reveals several chairs resting against the canal bulkhead, seemingly confirming Vedder’s contention that householders used the grade-raising to dispose of unwanted objects.
The world depicted in these images is disconcerting. Conventional boundaries are weakened or absent. In three of the images (V-2721, V-2725 and V-2728) water divides the image, flowing across the center of the picture, a path for the dredges that are engaged in this reclamation of land from the sea. The banks of the canal are defined and precise. But there is an unusual proximity between the canal and business and residential structures. This is not an established wharf area, nor are these building of the type usually seen on a waterfront. The dredges appear to be moving through the street/water way like any other public or commercial vehicle. Again, only someone familiar with the grade-raising story or grade-raising in general might be able to decipher what is represented in these photographs. In the two images (CN 08174 and V-2718) the breakdown of boundaries is more complete. Certain conventions seem to have disappeared entirely. Boats are on land. Buildings seem to float. The concrete jetty moves in a strong diagonal from the lower right of the picture to a point in the center of the image. To the right is the sea and to the left is the land, a starkly obvious visual representation of the most basic aspect of Galveston's existence. Behind the wall there appears to be chaos; an uneven hodge-podge of muck and water, buildings and boats. The dredge sits between structures and protective wall, perhaps functioning as a sentry on patrol guarding the buildings from deceptively calm seas beyond the jetty. Land and water seem to freely intermingle; ships and buildings work in close, unnatural proximity. In CN08174, as in the previous picture, the buildings, separated from the water by a patrolling dredge, seem to peek cautiously over the canal levee. There are no individuals in these particular photographs. Objects of industry and civilization—buildings and vessels—exist uneasily in the natural world of land and water that are shown. The precariousness of human existence is vividly portrayed.
All of these images of the grade-raising are extraordinary—such unconventional representations of landscapes, ships, and buildings that they at once document an amazing engineering project and, when taken out of their historical context, open themselves to whimsical, tragic, and ironic visions. In January 1904 E. R. Cheesborough contacted W. H. Plummer in Millbridge, Maine, to secure a lease for the canal right-of-way. “The Grade-raising Board,” he wrote, “is doing everything that mortal men can do to succeed in their stupendous undertaking, and we believe that success is assured.” Paul Verkin’s photographs immortalize that effort, and, at the same time, by the uniqueness of their appearance and incongruity of their representations, create another richly evocative imaginative space.
Chapter Six:

"Working the Waterfront on Film": Images from the Verkin and Simon Collections

Producing an exhibition of selected Verkin and Simon images was a logical outgrowth of researching the collections. Just as textual research and information is presented to the public through books and monographs, visual data is naturally conveyed through offering images to the public in an exhibition setting. To that end, ninety-seven of the photographs were included in "Working the Waterfront on Film: Images from the Verkin and Simon Collections," a museum exhibition produced in the fall of 1994 at the Galveston County Historical Museum in Galveston, Texas. Subsequent installations occurred at the Rice University Media Center (Houston, Texas) and the Louisiana State Museum (New Orleans, Louisiana). ¹ The exhibition was conceived as a temporary, traveling installation designed to be low cost in production and flexible in arrangement. Creating such a presentation required integrating exhibition research, design, and production, image selection, and timely fundraising to generate framed photographs, accompanying interpretation, and appropriate museum venues.

Museums and the exhibitions that they produce have become a fertile field for cultural studies and critical analysis in recent years. This chapter—and the production it describes—negotiates this theoretical and practical higher with trepidation; takes into account the socially constructed nature of museums, their publics, and their exhibitions; and works within that context to explicate a specific exhibition design. Accepting

¹ "Working the Waterfront on Film: Images from the Verkin and Simon Collections" Galveston County Historical Museum, Galveston, Texas, November 26, 1994–March 31, 1995, Rice Media Center, Houston, Texas, April 4–April 23, 1995, The Presbytere, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, June 8–November 12, 1995. In September 1995 the exhibition was awarded a certificate of commendation by the American Association for State and Local History.
traditional behavioral research explaining why people visit museums and how they learn once they are there (and realizing that these notions are being challenged).

"Working the Waterfront on Film" attempts to treat traditional visual materials—photographs—in a different way than for either history or art museums. By doing so, the curator hoped to attract varied and overlapping audiences and to present these images in an intellectually challenging way. 2

Museum exhibitions function within a culture whose authority derives from complex, architectural and ceremonial programs that are constructed and developed by their societies. Museums and their programs—buildings and contents—are complicated, overdetermined institutions created to fulfill certain social, political and cultural needs. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach argue that the “museum’s primary function is ideological. It is meant to impress upon those who use or pass through it society’s most revered beliefs and values.” 3 They go on to suggest that “[T]he

2 The nature of museums and their role within the larger culture have come under increasing scrutiny. Museum studies is an active critical field these days utilizing methodologies developed within the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, sociology and the wider field of cultural studies and applied to other media analyses. See especially Ghislaine Lawrence, "Rats, Street Gangs and Culture: Evaluation in Museums," in Gaynor Kavanagh, Museum Languages: Objects and Texts (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991) 9-32; Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Peter Vergo, ed., The New Museology (London: Reaktion Books, 1989); and Robert Lumley, ed., The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display (London: Routledge, 1988). Exhibition design is an evolving process practiced within a larger institutional setting that has depended upon conventional evaluative methods to determine success or failure. In the midst of very valid challenges to long-held assumptions and analytical tools, curators and exhibition planners are faced with creating exhibitions that present objects and/or texts in a comprehensible form for some pre-determined audience. The best that may be hoped for is an effort by those curators and institutions to incorporate insights gained into what eventually appears in exhibition spaces.

3 Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum,” Art History 3, No. 4 (December 1980) 449 (first quotation) pp. 450-1 (second quotation). A universal survey museum is most often “the large municipal or national museum devoted to surveys of old masters and monumental art through the ages, and . . . . may
museum itself—the installations, the layout of rooms, the sequence of collections—creates an experience that resembles traditional religious experiences. By performing the ritual of walking through the museum, the visitor is prompted to enact and thereby to internalize the values and beliefs written into the architectural script."\(^4\)

And that architectural script is the product of both circumstance and intention. The first public museums were generally private or royal collections opened to selected visitors or to certain portions of the public. As such, they were generally housed in large ceremonial spaces. In many cases, early museums were massive ceremonial structures, private homes, or royal quarters built to house collections accumulated by wealthy and successful leaders. French Revolutionaries created the first public national museum—the Louvre—in palatial royal structures, and subsequent national museums patterned themselves on the architecture program developed by the Parisian institution. Later, “[m]useums built during the first great age of museum building deliberately recalled past ceremonial architecture. The forms that were chosen evoked temples, palaces, treasuries and tombs.” \(^5\) "The creation of the public art museum did not merely involve opening up a royal ceremonial space to a newly constituted public. To serve the new needs of the state, the collection had to be presented in a new way."\(^6\) And so, works were presented within a set historical program developed for objects understood to be of artistic value, exhibited and classified according to where they fit in that

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also incorporate other museum types housed in special wings or sections.” (p. 451) "The universal survey museum is not only the first in importance, it is also the first museum type to emerge historically, and from the beginning it was identified with the idea of the public art museum” (p. 452). American examples would be the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City or the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 450–1.

\(^5\) Ibid., 452.

\(^6\) Ibid., 455.
accepted art history narrative. On the one hand, such a presentation democratized art, allowing anyone who could learn the program to learn the art and gain credence as a knowledgeable, enlightened individual. On the other hand, by insisting on positioning work within this art history continuum, the objects “could only appear as a moment of art history. . . . In the museum, whatever meaning a work of art owed to its original context was lost.”

Creating an art history narrative also removed the objects from more contentious political arenas. Objects understood to be “art” moved above the fray of national or international conflicts. Other ramifications of an art history context emerged from the curatorial culture discussed below that developed concurrently with these public art museums.

Overwhelmingly, modern universal survey museums are owned and maintained by the nation-state in which they operate.

[T]he wealth of the collection is still a display of national wealth and is still meant to impress. But now the state . . . replaces the king as host. This change redefines the visitor. . . . as a citizen and therefore a shareholder in the state. The museum . . . displays spiritual wealth that in theory belongs to everyone — or rather spiritual wealth that is publicly owned through the medium of the state. . . . The visitor inherits this spiritual wealth but only on the condition that he lay claim to it in the museum. Thus the museum is the site of a symbolic transaction between the visitor and the state. In exchange for the state’s spiritual wealth, the individual intensifies his attachment to the state. . . .

Duncan and Wallach refer to art museums, but their analysis may be also be

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extended to history museums. One of the reasons an art history narrative is prized within museums is because that account is perceived to be ahistorical. Objects are understood independently of specific circumstance and solely as exemplars of civilization itself (usually Western). This obscures the fact that many of the objects valued as exemplars are also, and perhaps primarily, historical artifacts—spoils of war or other political interactions. In privileging an art historical narrative, curators and art museum professionals ignore other equally valid accounts surrounding the creation and/or acquisition of works and deny meanings those contexts create. Secondly, history museums often accept and reproduce the same kind of ceremonial architectural program and ritual experience established by art museums. In addition, by housing and preserving sacred objects crucial to the creation and legitimacy of the presiding nation-state, history museums are even more overt in their political or ideological aims.

Museums, therefore, are institutions with a particular role in society. At their most basic level, museums collect and preserve important ‘things’. However, a museum is not just a preserver of precious relics but an informational link between these objects and the world. The preferred ‘truth’ of the objects in a collection is constructed by an exhibition team’s selection of objects, by what they choose to say and particularly what they choose not to say about them. “The display and interpretation of collections not only educates and fascinates, but influences... Museum staff, therefore, have a responsibility to be very clear about which messages they are trying to communicate... It is very important that staff have some idea about the potential audience.”

Modern museums must increasingly justify their existence on the basis of the size of the public they serve. Therefore, institutions work to increase their visitation,

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9 Helen Coxall, “How language means: an alternative view of museums text” in Gaynor Kavanagh, Museum Languages, 93.
and undertake research to understand what motivates museum visitors. One such study suggests that adults commonly use six criteria when making leisure-time choices:

1. being with people, or social interaction
2. doing something worthwhile
3. having the challenge of new experience
4. having an opportunity to learn
5. participating actively
6. feeling comfortable and at ease in one’s surroundings

Visitors to museums value criteria 2, 3, and 4, most highly. They form a minority of the general population, but a majority of museum visitors. As museums attempt to reach those segments of the population that place a priority on other criteria, they may develop services and programming to attract people seeking social experiences, a greater sense of comfort or ease in surroundings, or more active involvement.

Museums usually design their exhibitions and programming with an eye toward this mixture of motivations that determine audience. Besides working to understand why people visit museums, other studies examine museum visitor behavior within a gallery or exhibition. David Dean identifies three basic types of museum visitors. One type moves through a gallery quickly and appears to be most interested in proceeding through the exhibition and exiting. He or she spends very little time closely involved in the presented materials. The second kind of viewer is most interested in the objects.

\[10\] Marilyn Hood, “Staying Away, Why People Choose Not to Visit Museums,” Museum News 61(4) 51. The survey discussed in Hood’s article is especially important because she sought to sample potential museum visitors, to understand why people do not visit museums. Most museum surveys sample visitors on site, those already visiting the institution. Hood randomly sampled Toledo, Ohio, residents about why they did not perceive the Toledo Museum of Art as a choice for leisure activity.

\[11\] Ibid., p. 54.
Possessing a genuine interest in the articles displayed, this museum-goer spends little time reading available texts, especially if the written materials require effort to understand. They take a “headline” approach to interpretive materials, desiring only the most basic and general of information. A third category of visitor, in the minority, is willing to devote a significant amount of time to the exhibition. This viewer reads and is able to understand all of the textual materials presented and gives the displayed objects close and careful examination. This third audience segment visits museums regularly and requires little encouragement to come.  

With these patterns of museum visitation in mind, “Working the Waterfront on Film” was produced for a broad, non-traditional audience including scholars as well as the general public. As a photography exhibition, the images displayed are less intimidating than paintings, sculptures, or other fine art forms. Photography, because of its familiarity, is perceived to be a less foreign exhibition subject. For good or ill, audiences assume a level of comprehensibility for photographs. This particular production sought to attract both professional historians, art historians, and others interested in an interdisciplinary approach to historic photography. In addition, by its subject matter, the exhibition attracted individuals from Galveston and those who had direct experience of working the waterfront portrayed or connections to port activity in general. To accommodate all potential audience members, the exhibition was designed with interpretation that provided general context for the casual visitor and with special programs conceived by curator and host institution as supplements for more interested participants. The exhibition was designed to be engaged by the visitor in a variety of ways through the range of interpretive options offered. Specific details of installation and interpretation are discussed below. Venues chosen for the exhibition are public

sites, open at no charge, that have extended public hours to facilitate attendance by those with flexible schedules and that also have an institutional commitment to ancillary programming.

Goals for “Working the Waterfront on Film” were explicitly stated in grant proposals:

1. To explore the use of photographs as historical source materials and show how they might be used in conjunction with textual materials.

2. To show

   a) the variety of watercraft present in the Port of Galveston. . .
   b) the ethnic and racial diversity of the waterfront workforce and the degree to which that workforce was integrated by task and/or activity
   c) and personalize, through the Simon portraits, that workforce and to offer direct evidence of the worker diversity cited above
   d) the rapid technological change in ship design and commercial activity on the waterfront

3. To show and discuss the essentially aesthetic quality of the images and the effectiveness of visual images in conveying information.

4. To add to the larger social history of the Texas Gulf Coast and national maritime history. 13

Unlike conventional history exhibitions or art exhibitions, “Working the Waterfront on Film” sought to explore the images as both historical source and visual image. What information did the photographs convey and, through their particular

13 Texas Committee for the Humanities Grant narrative, p. 2.
visual qualities, how did the images convey it? Was there additional information or suggestion implicit in the photograph's composition or subject? Did some of the images fit within a larger art historical or history of photography context? This hybrid intention, requiring the combination of traditional historical display and art museum convention, determined the primary form and content of the exhibition. In addition, these goals expanded the installation's envisioned audience to include viewers with both historical and artistic interests.

Selecting images for this exhibition, then, required a different set of criteria than choosing photographs for strictly research purposes. Since the two collections are large, only a small portion of the existing material could be used at all. Rather than a random sampling from available resources, groups of images illuminating particular topics would fit with the stated goals of the exhibition and testify most effectively to the value of the collections. Eight to ten general subject areas were developed prior to surveying the collections. Examining the 4000+ negatives of the Verkin materials narrowed those topics to four. For practical reasons, eighty to one hundred images were the maximum number of photographs projected for the exhibition. Selecting and printing that number, given the costs estimated by the lending institutions, produced both a representative sampling and a reasonable budget.

The exhibition photographs needed to have documentary or informational value and visual power. At their most basic level, the photographs had to be comprehensible. They should be in focus with sharp definition where possible. Since the images were historical, most often of objects, sites, or people, they had to be recognizable as such, with common referents and familiar orientations—land and shore, floors and ceilings, bodies positioned naturally—that would be understood. People had to look like people. In addition, the images had to have visual appeal, be attractive to a viewer, elicit curiosity. Besides suggesting the kind of photographs to use, determining an audience
set some basic parameters for image content as well. Both the Verkin and Simon materials used for this dissertation and exhibition focus on the Gulf Coast waterfront from the period 1900 to 1930. 14 Those boundaries ruled out images of the East Texas oil fields, most commercial portraiture, and other unrelated subjects present within the collections.

Upon surveying the Verkin collection, four specific categories became increasingly clear. By far the most visually powerful images were port promotional materials created to market the port of Galveston to shippers throughout the country. They are convincing advertising photographs with dramatic compositions of men and machinery, light and dark. A second group of photographs records one of the most unusual events in Galveston history—the grade raising. The images chronicle an amazing civil engineering feat while at the same time suggest the incongruity and possible futility of such an effort. In addition, the grade raising event occurred on the Gulf side of the island and the photographs document a non-industrial, though no less commercial, waterfront. A third section demonstrates the range of activities on the industrial waterfront, illustrating the diversity of employment available and the varied composition of the workforce. A fourth grouping of ship portraits was selected for three reasons. One, the portraits documented the vast spectrum of watercraft frequenting the port. Secondly, as images, they provided a marvelous art historical link between ship portrait painters from the sixteenth century onward and modern commercial photography. Thirdly, they were the mechanical or industrial mates to the sailor portraits used from the Simon collection. Circumstance governed the selection of images from the Simon collection. Owned by the Louisiana State Museum, the sailor

14 Early plans called for delineating the period 1880–1930 for study but further research narrowed the span that could be effectively covered. Selecting the topics of the exhibition photographs determined the parameters of the dissertation and narrowed its focus as well.
portraits comprise only a small part of that 23,000-image collection. The fragility of the glass negatives and the absence of on-site darkroom facilities meant that only negatives previously printed (but largely unused) could be used for the exhibition.

In addition to the specifically topical images that composed the body of the exhibition, two other photographs were used. One, from the Verkin collection, shows Paul Verkin Jr. on a Galveston pier. The other, from a private collection, captures Paul Verkin Sr. and his assistant Leonard Thompson setting up their equipment, also on a Galveston wharf. These two images were used in the general information portion of the exhibition to support textual materials about the photographers.

Image selection and exhibition research was conducted simultaneously with dissertation research. Financial support from Rice University and a fellowship from the Peabody Essex Museum funded both research efforts. A grant from the Texas Committee for the Humanities funded exhibition production while Rice University and the Galveston Historical Foundation provided administrative support.

Since the targeted audience comprised historians, art historians, and the general public, the exhibition used display practices from both history museums and art museums. What distinguishes history museums is the role of objects within their collections and exhibitions. How history museums treat objects is their defining characteristic. Gaynor Kavanagh suggests that objects be understood as “part of a complex system of social language.”15 History museums, more than any other, examine objects within a wider context. They “look not only at the messages the object itself conveys in its material and manufactured form but also at the meaning and interrelationships of this within contemporary social codes... The study of objects in their context of use and in the wider patterns of social and cultural signification

provides the essence of history museum practice." 16

History museum exhibitions may be divided into roughly the same categories as written histories. While the fit may not be exact, exhibitions, like historical texts, may be understood as narrative, descriptive, or analytical. A museum that moves the visitor through a series of galleries or cases organized chronologically is presenting its materials in primarily narrative form, telling a story of people, events, or objects within a clear progression of time and/or place. Historical sites are usually descriptive in nature, re-created to a particular period—perhaps even a specific day and hour—to show the viewer precisely the conditions of life or course of events during a given time. Analytical exhibitions are more difficult to categorize. They often attempt to examine change over time, to use objects and text to explore abstract concepts, to question how certain attitudes or beliefs came to be, or to challenge prevailing stereotypes and myths. Most history museum exhibits are descriptive or narrative because they so frequently depend upon objects for their foundation. Chronology is a universally understood organizing concept and ‘things’ lend themselves to easy physical description. Displaying more abstract notions requires greater depth of knowledge on the part of curators and greater skill of designers. 17 Traditional history museum display, then, presents objects with background. Such exhibitions generally both provide obvious descriptive information about particular objects and make some effort to place them within a larger chronological or social context.

Placing objects or artifacts on display within a written or verbal context is no different from using particular textual materials produced by an individual or organization to buttress a specific written interpretation of events. Historical exhibition

16 Ibid., 110-11.

17 Ibid., 131-32.
interpretation, usually textual in form, may be treated as any other written historical interpretation. Circumstances surrounding production, cultural context of objects and texts, and particular historical interpretations supported or refuted are issues addressed by historical museum exhibitions—and not without some challenge and resistance. (See note 2, above.) As the controversy over the Enola Gay restoration attests, historical objects are not without interpretive baggage.\(^\text{18}\) As artifacts granted relevance or importance by a culture through their existence in a particular place and time, objects acquire meaning from their contexts. Those contexts may be highly contested, but no less essential in justifying or explaining why an object is worth exhibiting. Traditional historical museum display practices require the curator to provide interpretive background for an object.

Conversely, traditional art museum display conventions ignore historical context in favor of placing works within an implicit art historical narrative.\(^\text{19}\) Art objects are generally shown with simple labels identifying title, artist, and perhaps date of execution. The medium used, museum accession number, donor, or lender may be included, also. What is usually implicit is that the viewer should already know why the work is worthy of study and exhibition.\(^\text{20}\) Philip Wright argues that art museums should concentrate on "meeting the needs of the visitors as users of the art museum ... rather than of granting curators a space in which to illustrate the latest construct of art


\(^{20}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 125.
Art objects notoriously "speak for themselves."

What is shown is a history of style, as written by those-in-the-know, divided up by media (oil paint, watercolour, printing, etc.), subject, schools and movements, nationalities, and occasionally by individual artists or patrons. It is alleged that this best 'allows the works to speak for themselves,' but to those who lead busy lives outside the confines of full-time art history, it must at times seem as if the intent is deliberately to conceal the several meanings of works of art, by offering hardly any clues to those who are not fortunate or privileged enough to have studied them beforehand . . . . It is doubtful if any but the most knowledgeable visitors to an art museum grasp the thought, scholarship, and several possible meanings of a gallery 'hang'.

What motivated an artist or who might have commissioned the work for what reason are questions rarely asked or answered. Works fit within a defined art historical context of specific schools or traditions, but general historical circumstances surrounding their creation are rarely detailed. Ironically, art museums are moving increasingly—and not without difficulty—toward providing more historical context at the same time historical museums are being encouraged by some constituencies—in order to avoid controversy—to provide less.

Designing an exhibition of images from the Verkin and Simon collections, then,

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21 Ibid., p. 133.

22 Ibid., p. 125.

23 Patricia B. Bixel "When We Said It Was Political": The West As America, Museum Audiences and Museum History Education," unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain American Studies Association, University of Utah, 29 April - 2 May, 1994.
was an attempt to take advantage of the growing convergence of history and art museum practice and expand that practice to historical photographic materials. Formally, the exhibition was organized in a non-narrative way by topic so that the visitor might enter the presentation at any point. The installation is comprised of six sections. A general information (1) segment provides the exhibition rationale, describes the collections and explains the method of organization and interpretation. Sailor portraits from the Simon collection (2) are counterbalanced by a number of ship portraits from the Verkin collection (3). Port promotional images from the Verkin collection (4), Verkin’s grade raising photographs (5), and views of workers and waterfront activities (6) make up the remaining divisions.

The ship and sailor portrait sections are intentionally balanced and installed adjacent to one another so that the viewer may reflect upon objects and people represented, for all intents and purposes, in the same way. This paired grouping is a logical one, presenting by physical arrangement the symbiotic relationship of object and caretaker as well as the relatively equal status of both kinds of subjects. In addition, the number of ship portraits suggests both the magnitude of the collection and variety of documented craft. The sailors are presented as a group just as they functioned in a ship’s crew, noteworthy as parts of a larger whole. Anonymous individuals, they may be seen as interchangeable parts in another kind of industrial machine. All of the images are the same framed size: 12” x 14”. The ship portraits (33 images) are oriented horizontally while the sailor portraits (22 images) are primarily (19 of 22) vertical in alignment. The remaining sections are anchored by a single large framed print.

(20" x 24") with supporting 12" x 14" images. Two text panels formulated in accordance with the interpretive design described below are located within each section. The framed images are identified by numbers placed on the wall that refer to a printed, five page label list available at the exhibition entrance.

Supplemental written material is available to the audience, but is not essential. The spectator may simply view the images; view the images and read general explanatory panels; or view the images, read the panels, and obtain a detailed label list that provides the archival information for each photograph. Two kinds of explanatory panels accompany each section. One, in black, presents the historical context of the group, detailing circumstances surrounding creation of specific photographs. The second, in red, offers a more imaginative reading of the pictures, a way of considering the material within a context broader than the documentary.

Text readability is an ongoing concern of exhibition planners. Not only should the typeface be legible, it should be of sufficient height to be easily seen. Above all, the text itself must be understood by a majority of readers. Text panels for "Working the Waterfront on Film" were produced in Times New Roman typeface, using conventional upper and lower case presentation. Each panel had 37 point titles and 18 point text. While 18 point type is smaller than recommended for main texts, the small scale of the exhibition and the expectation that viewers would examine images and text closely removed concern about ultimate readability. Putting the text in 24 point type would have increased the number of panels and interfered with the overall simplicity of design. In addition, the panels were installed slightly below centerline to further encourage the visitor to approach the panels.

As mentioned above, the exhibition offers several kinds of written texts. A label

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list available to the visitor contains all known archival information about the photographs and represents traditional labeling practice. For design and installation reasons, the labels were compiled into a single printed list as opposed to individual captions applied to the wall near each image. An introductory explanation at the top of the first page of the list explains the material’s organization and serves to guide the viewer through the images, decoding the written material.

The larger mounted text panels represent another kind of information offered. Several formulas exist to assess written passages in terms of approximate reading age. Samples from exhibition text panels were subjected to the Fry Test of reading age level.26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Sample</th>
<th>Sentences/100 words</th>
<th>Syllables/100 words</th>
<th>Reading age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Paragraph 1,</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>151.3</td>
<td>15–16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Panel I.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Paragraph 3,</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>138.7</td>
<td>13–14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Panel II. B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Paragraphs 3,</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>17–college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, Text Panel V.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.

The three sections tested include a segment of historical information, a section of more

26 Belcher, pp. 165-66. The Fry Test is as follows:
1. Select a simple passage of about 100 words.
2. Count the number of sentences in the passage and calculate the number of sentences per 100 words.
3. Count the number of syllables in the passage and calculate the number of syllables per 100 words.
4. Use the provided graph to determine the reading age for the passage.
5. Test two or more passages and average the results for greater accuracy.
imaginative interpretation, and a simple description of the Verkin studio. Clearly, the written material provided on the text panels requires a level of reading comprehension higher than normally expected from museum visitors. If this were the only information available within the exhibition, concern about visitor understanding might be justified, but the variety of ways that the exhibition might be experienced—images only, list and images, images and text—assures access to anyone interested in learning about the photographs. There are only two text panels per exhibition section, so interpretive demands placed on the viewer are relatively light, and the curator was reluctant to interpret for the lowest common denominator. There is as much danger in diluting interpretation to the point of banality as in making it too esoteric.

The way the photographs are mounted emphasizes their documentary role. Eighteen of the ninety-eight Verkin photographs in the exhibition are contact prints of glass plate negatives, and mounting the prints on top of a matte, with clear corners, lets the viewer know she is seeing an uncropped, unretouched image. Negative number notations have been preserved, and no attempt has been made to restore or repair damaged negatives. For a variety of reasons, the Simon sailor portrait prints were made from duplicate negatives made from original glass plates and hinge-mounted conventionally beneath archival matte material. The original glass plates of the Simon portraits frequently contained two images. For the exhibition the images were printed singly where possible. Because the exhibition is a temporary installation with a projected life span of two years, the photographs were matted and framed in a way that assures their protection but does not meet with archival standards for permanent mounting. At the close of the exhibition, the prints will be removed from their frames and returned to their lending institutions.27

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27 TCH Grant Narrative, p. 4.
As a traveling exhibition, the design must be adaptable to a variety of space configurations. This is another reason for a non-narrative arrangement that permits entry at any point. Floor plans of the first two installations are provided in the appendices and suggest the variations that may occur among spaces. The first location required an extremely linear configuration, drawing the viewer along a long and relatively narrow second floor gallery. The walls of the Galveston County Historical Museum, a converted bank building, are stone, and the framed photographs were hung on composite panels placed between stone columns. The groups were positioned by a kind of "flush-edge placement" method, a way of hanging in which works are placed in a group with frame edges aligned. This maintains the integrity of the group and encourages the viewer to consider the works within that context.\(^{28}\) Another advantage of a flush-edge arrangement is the "machinelike rigidity" it may convey.\(^{29}\) For photographs of working subjects and functional objects within a commercial setting, such an arrangement contributes to the impression of industry, modernity, and perhaps anonymity engendered by the images.

One end of the upper gallery was a closely circumscribed rectangular space with walls on three sides. This permitted a close juxtaposition of the ship and sailor portraits. Viewers stepping into the space were surrounded by ships and sailors, the framed pieces—all the same size—wrapping around the walls in three rows. While the viewer in the space might feel crowded, that impression was appropriate to the material. The number of vessels and individuals involved in port activities was immense, the shapes and sizes of the men as variable as the shapes and sizes of the ships.

The exhibition was marketed and publicized through the Galveston Historical


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 29.
Foundation (GHF). An opening was held in conjunction with the November 26, 1994, “Artwalk,” a regularly scheduled Saturday evening of gallery openings and performances. A direct mail piece was sent to approximately 1,500 GHF members as well as members of the Propeller Club and other maritime organizations. Exhibition posters were distributed in Galveston, with special efforts made to place them in ILA Halls and waterfront businesses. On Thursday, February 16, 1995, the museum hosted a lunch time event in conjunction with the exhibition that included brief presentations by Patricia Bixel, curator of the exhibition, Ernest Connor, current manager of the Port of Galveston, and Tommy Townsend, a retired longshoreman and exhibition advisor. Eighty-nine people attended the noon event, testing the capacity of the site and its luncheon provisions. During the exhibition’s installation, approximately 1800 visitors attended the museum.

The second exhibition area was more traditional. An upstairs gallery at the Rice University Media Center, the space was surprisingly suited to this particular exhibition. Low ceilinged, floored by a wooden deck and possessing an architectural detail involving rails and an open space, the gallery seemed tailored to a maritime exhibition and the curator and installer played with the space in that way. In this situation, the sailor portraits were grouped facing opposite ends of the railing. A viewer examining the portraits would then glance over the rail at ships passing down the opposite wall. While the two groups were not immediately adjacent to one another, the relationship was effectively conveyed by using unique features of the exhibition space. Sheetrock made the entire space available for hanging, and the topic groups were arranged on walls surrounding the railed area. The main title and general information were displayed downstairs, providing background for the visitor before entering the main second floor exhibition space.

A reprinting of the exhibition’s direct mail piece was sent to Rice Media Center
mailing list members and an opening was held—after a day of thunderstorms and torrential downpours—on Tuesday, April 4, 1995. Special programs were also held during the Rice installation. On April 11, the curator met with an advanced art history seminar to discuss the use of historic photography and the special nature of the exhibition’s portraits. That evening, the Media Center was the site of a meeting of the Houston Area Southern History seminar, whose participants discussed the exhibition as a work of southern history research. In addition, two private tours of art educators viewed the exhibition during its Houston presentation. From Houston, the exhibition traveled to New Orleans where it was installed from June 8 until November 13, 1995, in the rotating exhibition gallery at the Presbytere, a property of the Louisiana State Museum.

Producing “Working the Waterfront on Film” was a far less linear project than the preceding chapter might suggest. The factors discussed here—exhibition research, design and production, image selection, and funding—are far more interactive than might be understood from the foregoing information. Curatorial intent—the message of the exhibition—defined to some extent the audience for the exhibition. Conversely, choosing a primary audience—the general public and humanities scholars—determined the kind of interpretation that would work effectively with the images and the chances for raising money to produce the show.

Gaynor Kavanagh, in discussing history exhibitions, suggests the wider impact such productions may have:

Where, for example, museum histories discriminate and omit, they further legitimize discrimination and omission. Where they commemorate and celebrate, they permit commemoration and celebration. Where they question and consider, they promote questioning and consideration.30

30 Kavanagh, History Curatorship, 127.
"Working the Waterfront on Film: Images from the Verkin and Simon Collections" was created to promote questioning and consideration of familiar objects and topics presented in a less familiar way. The exhibition explores the range of interpretive possibilities offered by historical photographs. And it attempts to execute that exploration in textual and non-textual ways, asking interested individuals to read and look, to interact straightforwardly and imaginatively with visual and written materials. It is hoped that through this exhibition the Galveston waterfront and its denizens live more vividly in collective memory, and Paul Verkin and Achille Simon are remembered as sensitive master craftsmen.
Conclusion:

Commercial Photography and Community Studies

Not all commercial photography archives lend themselves to historical interpretation, nor are all historical episodes enriched by visual materials. But where there exists a visible documentary record of important individuals, groups, locations, or events, researchers may gain valuable and unique insights from examining what members of a community chose to commemorate and to view. Each image preserved for posterity is an informational object that has been intentionally retained—saved because of its value for some purpose. The Verkin Studio of Galveston, Texas, during its almost seventy years of operation, amassed an archive particularly suited to close consideration and interpretation. Intensely involved in photographing Galveston’s major industry—the port—the studio created a body of work that chronicled the Wharf Company’s buildings and business, its major players, daily activities, and important events. Photographs, about 2 percent of the total surviving holdings from this collection, were selected with an eye toward four specific areas for examination—the wharves, the workers, the ships, and the grade raising—and subjected to a two-fold method of analysis, an effort to understand them as information and as object. Interpreted in these ways, the photographs help to recover and reconstruct an industrial community that was an integral part of Galveston, Texas.

In the case of the photographs commissioned by the Galveston Wharf Company and other commercial or business interests, the history of Galveston Island, its reliance on the port for economic success, and the slow, frustrating decline of the city’s maritime fortunes may be seen and grasped more thoroughly through the selected images. Industrial attitudes toward growth; corporate visions of success; and employer views toward workers may be gleaned from these images. Besides literally offering the
vision of a particular kind of corporate viewpoint, the images are striking representations of industrial structures and activities. Frequently used for promotion or commemoration, some of the pictures are very successful as visually appealing depictions of fairly mundane subject matter. Apart from their intentional role as conveyors of information, they work through use of composition, lighting, and contrast to give a more general sense of mechanical objects and operations, and they address larger issues of modernization, industrialization, and man's interaction with such processes.

The second group of images—the workers—show a viewer the myriad kinds of activities on a working waterfront. For the vast majority of the population that lives far away from a working port, the pictures suggest the amazingly diverse kinds of work to be found near the water. In addition, these photographs, unlike their corporate counterparts discussed in the previous chapter, show some of the people that perform the work, documenting the range of age, race, class, and gender that might be found employed along the port’s piers and wharves. This section also includes a group of sailor portraits from another commercial studio in New Orleans, Louisiana, chosen to complete the circle of waterfront work, providing evidence of the individuals employed on board the vessels that called in Galveston and complementing the Verkin materials that recorded land-based workers.

Ports cease to function without ships, and the third selection of images documents the many different kinds of watercraft found in Galveston waters. The visual record of ships that called in the city, vessels from Texas, other American ports, and numerous foreign harbors, not only reinforces what we know about the cosmopolitan nature of seaports, but also provides details about the interaction of local and foreign craft, the different kinds of ships and boats that worked side by side, the variety of functions and services available in a harbor, and the wide range of ages
among ships. Grizzled veterans existed among the workforce and among the ships calling in port on any given day. The Verkin Studio's depictions of these ships, besides creating a record of port traffic, perpetuated the very stylized practice of ship portraiture by observing conventions of representation traceable to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The final selection of photographs portrays the endeavor known as the Galveston grade raising, an effort by the island's inhabitants that, in conjunction with the construction of a sea wall, was to prevent hurricane damage after the disastrous storm of 1900. By lifting every structure within the most populated sections of the island and pumping fill material underneath, Galvestonians managed to increase the height of their sandbar anywhere from one to thirteen feet. This elevation, when combined with the protection afforded by the sea wall, removed the most catastrophic threat posed by tropical storms that frequent the Gulf of Mexico. More than a textual recitation of the process, the Verkin photographs of this undertaking convey the precariousness of the island's existence, the ever-present conflict between man and the natural environment, and the lengths that at least one community went to in its attempt to eliminate danger. Finally, the pictures were assembled in an exhibition format to show, by example, how the interpretive techniques employed in this work might be translated into a three dimensional display for a broader public.

Equally important and an issue largely unaddressed here, are the people and events that are not shown. Noteworthy for their absence in this archive are scenes of labor strife, of the natural disaster of the 1900 Storm, or of any kind of accident or work stoppage. This particular interpretation accepts the viewpoint of the photographer completely, understanding at the same time that the viewpoint is overwhelmingly positive and laudatory. That these images are not contained among the negatives of the surviving archive shows a value judgment already made by the photographer, archivist,
and/or curator about what images are worth saving and/or exhibiting. This analysis is not an independent reconstruction of the maritime life of Galveston, Texas. On the contrary, its greatest usefulness is that it attempts to describe an industrial community in terms chosen by that community.

In developing and applying a methodology that uses selected portions of a commercial photography archive to illuminate a particular group or city—in this case the maritime interests of Galveston, Texas—this work shows the value that may be derived from careful and close interpretation of appropriate images. The photographs, however interesting by themselves, are only useful insofar as they may be grounded within the community that they commemorate. For that reason, the most valuable pictures are those whose whole history may be traced. Knowing who commissioned the photograph, who took the picture, and the use to which the image was put gives unique insights into the intentions and perceptions of a community's members. The Galveston Wharf Company, for example, reveals its attitude toward itself and its employees through the kinds of pictures that it paid for and which photographs were chosen for its publications.

Information about a community derived from indigenous sources has always been a mainstay of historical research. That same kind of information—albeit visual—is available to scholars in countless commercial photography archives. Integrating visual and textual source materials leads to a deeper understanding of a society and its inhabitants. In truth, a picture may indeed be worth a thousand words.
Appendix A: List of Photographs.

Note: This list has been reformatted to match the chapter organization of the dissertation.

Any titles that these images had when they were made were lost when the negatives were moved to their current archival locations. What follows are the archival notations and descriptions currently assigned to the photographs by their institutional owners. Those owners are listed at the end of each caption; all images copyright. The ships are the most clearly and completely identified objects in the Verkin photographs from Peabody Essex Museum because they were inventoried and catalogued by individuals particularly interested in documenting steamships and other craft.

Caption format (Not all of this information may be available for each vessel)

Exhibit number/ Institutional reference number/ Type of negative/ Ship name or description/ Type of vessel/ Former name (if available)/ Year built/ Place of construction/ Owner or operator of vessel/ Other information/ Owner of photograph

1. Photograph of Paul Verkin and associate, assembling equipment on wharf.

2. Photograph of Paul R. Verkin, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

America’s Port of Quickest Dispatch

3. V-2525, glass, Port view, note date in bottom left corner, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


11. V-2913, nitrate, Port of Galveston, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.
12. V-2121, glass, Moss Point, steamship (bow view only), 1919, Moss Point, Mississippi, U.S. Shipping Board, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

13. V-2836, nitrate, Port of Galveston, drydock, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


A well-fortified harbor...


19. V-2458, nitrate, Unidentified steamers at Galveston pier, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


22. V-2777, nitrate, Port of Galveston, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


24. V-2971, nitrate, Unidentified steamer, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

25. V-2482b, nitrate, Port of Galveston, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

27. V-2904, nitrate, Port of Galveston, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

28. V-2936, nitrate, Port of Galveston, Gulf Marine Ways, 7th and Wharf, Photograph taken January 9, 1941, showing marine railways and boats on them: J.F. Rader, motor vessel, pilot boat, 1931, Orange, Texas, Sabine, Texas pilots (owners), Sally Ann, motor vessel, Galveston, Texas No. 9, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

29. V-1530, nitrate, China Arrow, steamship (tanker), 1920, Quincy, Massachusetts, Socony Vacuum Oil Company, Inc., from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

30. V-2843, nitrate, one of a series, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

31 V-2929, nitrate, Morgan Line employees, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum

32. V-2822, nitrate, Pier construction, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

33. V-2786, nitrate, Port of Galveston, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

**Sailor Portraits**

34.–55. These images have no individual identification. They are part of the larger Achille Simon Collection held by the Louisiana State Museum.

**Ship Portraits**

56. V-1865, glass, Cora F. Cressy, 5 masted schooner, 1902, Bath, Maine, Percy and Small shipyard, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

57. V-1869, glass, Helen Thomas, 4 masted schooner, 1905, Thomaston, Maine, Washburn Bros. (builder), from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

58. V-3066, safety, unidentified fishing schooner under sail off Galveston, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


60. V-1749 glass, Brittaniana, barge (whaleback), 1891, West Superior, Wisconsin, Sabine Towing and Transport (owners), from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


62. V-126, glass, McClellan, U.S. Army transport, ex-Port Victor, 1885, Newcastle,


83. V-1713, glass, *C.W. Morse*, steamship (tug), 1889, Bath, Maine, J.A. McAllister (owner about 1916), from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.


85. V-1692, nitrate, *U.S.S. Memphis*, light cruiser, 1920-25 Wm Cramp and Sons, the engraved name on the negative suggests this image may have been used for a postcard or for large scale printing and distribution, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

86. V-121, glass, *Bremen*, German cruiser, 1902, Stettin, Germany, photographed at Galveston, 1905, from the Verkin Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.

**The dredge *Holm* will begin pumping...**


88. Galveston grade raising, Verkin Photography Company Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN08160.

89. Galveston grade raising, Verkin Photography Company Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN08161.

90. Galveston grade raising, Verkin Photography Company Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN08172.

91. Galveston grade raising, Verkin Photography Company Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN08173.

92. Galveston grade raising, Verkin Photography Company Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN08154.


98. Galveston grade raising, Verkin Photography Company Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, CN08174.
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