



## Message from the President

Katherine Goldberg

As I sit to write this message, we are in the middle of the COVID-19 shutdown. I sit in my home with my family with all of our modern day luxuries surrounding us. We have plenty of food and clean water, electricity and the all important air conditioning, as well as more things to entertain us than we could consume during this isolation period. In some ways, we in the modern world have come so far from the hardships and struggles of our pioneering ancestors, and yet, in some ways, we are still struck by the same human frailties that befell those who came before us.

I think of life on the frontier of Texas in the mid-1800's, which included not only the occasional threat of epidemic disease, but also the threat of Indian attack, general scarcity of supplies, and the dependence on Mother Nature providing rain and sun in sufficient, but not overwhelming, amounts. The anxiety that I feel about picking up germs during a weekly grocery run feels silly in the face of the stressors that our ancestors processed daily. While I have always said that we come from a pretty hardy stock, this current situation really drives that point home.

I don't just look at the stress that our ancestors faced, but also at their response to those stresses. Epidemic disease did touch the lives of the Polley family, but they persevered through tragedy. They built strong defenses against potential attacks and the Polley Mansion became a safe house for many



people during raids. Mary Bailey Polley arrived to Texas over 200 years ago as one of the first permanent Anglo settlers, and learned from a young age how to use scarce resources to provide enough for a family to thrive. In fact, the stories of celebrations at the Polley Mansion that have come down to us through history reveal that despite their frontier location, the Polley family lived lives of plenty during their heyday.

The resilience of the family and their ability to adapt to the changing world around them kept the Polley family moving forward one step at a time. So as descendants of those hardy pioneers, we will keep putting one foot in front of another to get through this current crisis, so that we may again come together in celebration at the Polley Mansion. We are continuing to plan for a Polley Family Reunion to be held in November this year, and I sure hope to be able to see you all there!

## 200 Years in Texas

If you know Texans, you know about our love for the Lone Star State, and our desire to highlight all of our 'first', 'best', and 'biggest' attributes. And in the coming years Texans will be celebrating many 200 year history milestones for the great state. In 1821, Stephen F. Austin first came to Texas to secure his inherited empresario rights following the death of his father, Moses. Austin would use this land grant to bring the first permanent Anglo settlement to the Spanish/Mexican frontier in what would become modern day Texas. Meeting up with Stephen F. Austin on his journey to San Antonio was a twenty-six year old man by the name of Joseph Henry Polley. That's right; our very own Joseph H. Polley was present at the very beginning of the modern day Texas story.



Not to be outdone (as no self-respecting Bailey would allow), Mary Augusta Bailey Polley first came to Texas in 1818, at the age of nine, three years before her future husband stepped foot on Texan soil. James Britton "Brit" Bailey, Mary's father, secured his own land rights from the Spanish government (though no known records exist to prove this land acquisition, and the legitimacy of Bailey's land claim has been suspect for 200 years as well). Mary and her family worked diligently to improve their land and prospects for three years until Stephen F. Austin brought his crew of men (including Joseph H. Polley) to southeast Texas.

So if you see flags flying to celebrate 200 years since the arrival of Austin's colony and the origins of modern Texas, just know that the Polley family had a front row seat...and that Mary got there first!

## Join Us in Membership!

Your membership is important to us and your dues help the association to preserve the legacy of Joseph H. Polley and his family. Association dues remain at \$25.00 for the year, and we would appreciate payment by June 30th. You can do this by credit card online by going to [www.PolleyAssociation.org/get-involved](http://www.PolleyAssociation.org/get-involved), or you can mail a check to:

Shirley Grammer  
P.O. Box 234  
La Vernia, Texas 78121

Now is the time to invite your family members to join the Polley Association! We have exciting things planned on the horizon and it is a great time to be a part of this group.

## Polley Family Cemetery

The primary function of the Polley Association is to keep the Polley Family Cemetery in good order, and with that in mind, the Polley Association Board has voted to move ahead with plans to update the inaccurate or incomplete headstones that lie within the Polley Family Cemetery.

Stones for Emeline Elizabeth Polley James, Edith Houston, George Smith Houston, and Joseph Henry Polley II will all be replaced with new stones that give the correct birth and death dates as provided by Polley descendants. The current headstones for these family members were all set sometime in the 1900's and were not original to the site.

Your dues and donations have made this project possible, and we thank all of our members for your generosity and commitment to preserving our Polley family legacy.

For a list of who is buried in the Polley Cemetery, visit [www.PolleyAssociation.org/polley-family-cemetery](http://www.PolleyAssociation.org/polley-family-cemetery)

## Officers

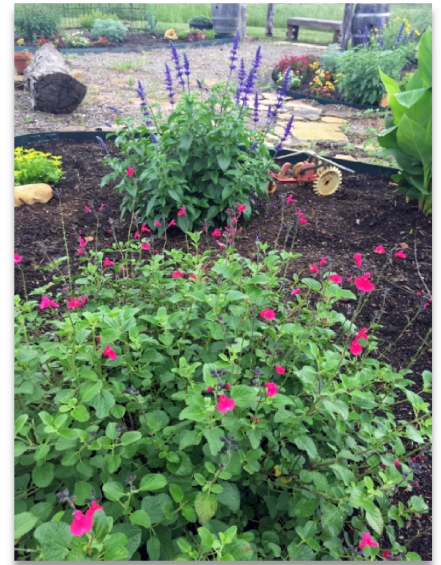
President - Katherine Goldberg  
Vice President - Melinda Kilian  
Secretary - Claudia Goldman  
Treasurer - Shirley Grammer



## Updates from the Polley Mansion

The restoration of the Polley Mansion continues with wonderful additions and impressive restorations. Keith and Robin Muschalek have been the owners and caretakers of Whitehall for nearly five years. In those five years, they have diligently worked to clean up the property and house that was nearly ruined from years of junk accumulation and desertion. They then set out to restore the home to its former glory with projects including a new roof, restored front porches, new two-story back porches, new windows, and so much more.

Recent improvements include the creation of a heritage garden in the yard where the old burn pit was located in the back of the mansion. They planted an herb garden, a few trees (Magnolia, Fig, and Mountain Laurel), and native plants. They plan on incorporating more plants that Mary Polley would have had, and/or plants common to the mid 1800's. The garden is also designated a Guadalupe County Master Gardeners site.



*Heritage Garden behind the Polley Mansion*



Last year, the chimney of the old cookhouse in the back of the mansion was lifted and leveled with great effort. This year the fireplace restorations continued as the Muschalek's hired two young stonemasons (who had previously worked on the San Antonio Missions) to repair all six fireplaces and the outside cistern.

For charm and whimsy, Robin installed a Little Free Library to resemble Whitehall outside the gate. She reports that they have a lot of visitors borrowing and donating books.

Last, but certainly not least, Keith and Robin just finished laying the beautiful new dining room floor. The planks are sixteen foot long 1x4" tongue and groove yellow pine, stained and varnished all within a week!



*Top Left: Little Free Library in front of Whitehall gate.*

*Lower Left: Stonemason at work on one of the six fireplaces.*

*Lower Right: New pine floors in the Polley Mansion dining room.*

*Inset: The dining room before any renovations began.*



*Photos courtesy of Robin Muschalek*



## San Felipe de Austin Exhibit

North of I-10, just west of Houston, lies a sleepy country road with a big history. FM 1458 passes through what once was the first bustling township in Stephen F. Austin's colony, San Felipe de Austin. There are hardly any traces of this town remaining since it was razed during the Runaway Scrape, as the Texian settlers left their homes and ran for their lives to flee the approaching Mexican Army. After the Revolution was won, the Texians decided against rebuilding the town, and instead moved to nearby towns of Washington on the Brazos, Richmond, or the newly incorporated Houston.

It wasn't until 1940 that the state declared the ruins of San Felipe de Austin a Texas Historical Site, and in April of 2018, Texas' newest history museum opened on the site, with plans for future archeological excavation and expansion. This is very exciting for the Polley family because our Joseph Henry Polley was one of the first residents of San Felipe de Austin, along with his young bride, Mary Bailey Polley. Joseph owned a sawpit and helped to build the young town in its infancy. The Polley's first child, Mary Augusta Polley was born in San Felipe in December of 1827. The Museum records that the Polley's probably left the town in 1828, and we know that they then settled in Marion/East Columbia, across the Brazos River from Mary's father, Brit Bailey.

Because of this early residency in the town and the integral role that Joseph Polley played in its construction, photographs of both Joseph and Mary are featured prominently in the new "Faces of Austin's Colony" exhibit at the museum, thanks to the Polley Association. This exhibit runs through late Spring 2020, but the Polley name can be found in other areas of the museum's permanent collection as well, and the museum is well worth a visit if you are in the area.

For more information about the museum, visit their website at [www.visitsanfelipedeatx.com](http://www.visitsanfelipedeatx.com)



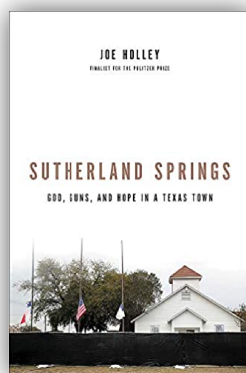
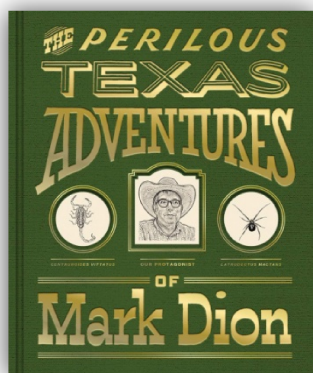
*San Felipe de Austin  
State Historic Site with  
Joseph and Mary Polley in the  
"Faces of Austin's Colony" exhibit.*

## Polley in the Press

The Polley family history provides a compelling story that many artists and writers have been attracted to over the years. This year is no exception as two more storytellers add their names to the Polley bibliography. Artist Mark Dion mentions his 2019 visit to Whitehall in his book, *The Perilous Texas Adventures of Mark Dion*. He is a conceptual artist that retraced the footsteps of a couple 19<sup>th</sup> Century explorers in Texas, including ornithologist John James Audubon, architect Frederick Law Olmstead, botanist Charles Wright, and watercolorist Sarah Ann Lillie Hardinge. Hardinge may be a familiar name to you since she was a tutor of the Polley children at Whitehall for one year between 1855 and 1856. Her son, Harry, was born at the Polley Mansion and she later painted a watercolor of the mansion from memory of which many of us are familiar. The release of Mr. Dion's book coincided with an exhibit of the same name at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas this spring. The Muschaleks (current Whitehall owners) were VIP guests at the opening of the exhibit and enjoyed contributing to Mr. Dion's work.

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Author Joe Holley, also published his recent book, *Sutherland Springs: God, Guns, and Hope in a Texas Town*, after periodically staying at the Linne house on the grounds of Whitehall in 2018-19. The book takes a look at the November 2017 Sutherland Springs church shooting, and Holley included a brief history of Joseph and Mary Polley in his book.



*Two new books that mention the Polley family and Whitehall.*

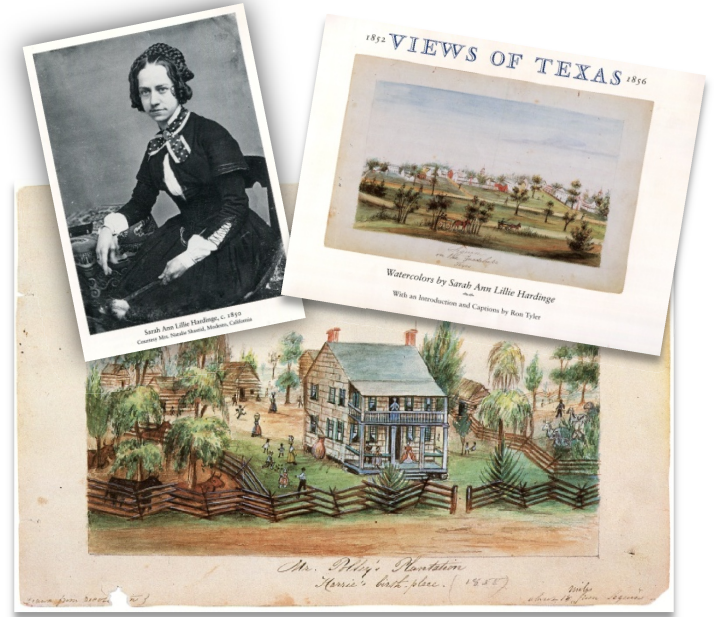


## Sarah Ann Lillie Hardinge's *Views of Texas*

*There are a number of great resources that catalog the history of the Polley family in Texas, and the Polley Association would like to point any interested family researchers to some of the best known sources. In this and future newsletters, we will highlight selected sources and we encourage all to delve further into them to learn more about our great family.*

One resource that provides us a first person account of life with the Polley family is *Views of Texas 1852-1856: Watercolors by Sarah Ann Lillie Hardinge*, which includes selections from her journal during her time in Texas. Sarah Hardinge travelled through Texas with her husband, George, trying to sort out a land inheritance from her brother. Texas, being a relatively young state at the time, was rich in land, but poor in cash. So while George struggled to convert Sarah's land inheritance into prosperity for the family, Sarah travelled around with him, recording their journey in her diary and painting sketches of life on the Texas frontier. For ten months at the end of their Texas sojourn, Sarah tutored children at the Polley Mansion.

The Hardinges met the Polley family at a religious camp meeting in Gonzales in the fall of 1854 where her diary records that she, "experienced shouting with joy never to be forgotten." The Polley Mansion had just recently been completed and the Polley family was settling into a more refined life on the Cibolo Creek in 1854-1855 after years in the temporary stake house. Joseph H. Polley arranged for Sarah to stay at Whitehall and tutor the children of the family and surrounding area. Sarah told her sister in a letter, "nearly all of my pupils board in the house with me, I have formed a Sabbath school class, in which the scholars have become greatly interested...I have at present fourteen scholars, and still expect more." A bill for teaching the children, which can be found on Page 15 of *Views of Texas*, records that Sarah gave the children drawing lessons twice a week over the course of ten months, totaling \$113.00.



*Views of Texas 1852-1856: Watercolors by Sarah Ann Lillie Hardinge  
"Mr. Polly's Plantation" ("drawn from recollection")  
featured on page 57.*

Schooling the Polley children wasn't the only thing on Sarah Hardinge's mind while living at Whitehall. She wrote several times to her sister about the threat of Indian attack. She wrote in her diary, "Great fright one night among us all hearing there were 400, going to burn the town or village of Seguin & would visit the Cibolo before morning - Aug. 1855 Neighbors coming in from their log homes to our two story stone house for protection - Slaves brought in and horses within enclosure. Knife, guns, spikes, stones & scalded water all in readiness, case of need, but thank God indeed it proved a false alarm." While the threat of a raid was a false alarm, the panic and fear seems palpable from Sarah's own words. The Polley Mansion was unique in the area for its large size and sturdy 18 inch thick stone walls, providing a refuge for those with less defensible homes.

One month after this incident, while Mrs. Hardinge was living with the Polley family, she gave birth to her third son, Harry, in September of 1855. Harry Hardinge would later come back to visit his birthplace in 1899, where he took several extremely valuable photographs that show us what the Polley Mansion looked like in the decades that lapsed between Mrs. Mary Polley's death and Judge Goeth's ownership in the 1920's & 30's. These are the earliest known photographs of the Polley Mansion.

In 1988, the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas held an exhibit of Mrs. Hardinge's watercolors as part of their decades-long effort to catalog a pictorial record of pre-Civil War Texas. *Views of Texas* is the companion book to that exhibit. Through this wonderful resource, we can catch a glimpse of life for the Polley family on the frontier of Texas in the mid 1850's, and what a life it was!



*The Polley Plantation,  
March 1899  
Photos taken by  
Harry Hardinge.*



## The Polley Association Turns 15!

It was 2005 when the Texas Historical Commission approved the application for a historical marker to be placed at the Polley Family Cemetery on FM 539 in Wilson County, Texas. Later that year, the first officers were selected for the new Polley Association. The following spring, the historical marker was erected and over 100 people, including many Polley descendants attended a dedication for the site.

This was the culminating moment for John and Shirley Grammer who had worked so hard to clean up the cemetery which had become overgrown and was in disrepair. Beginning in 2002, the Grammers spearheaded the effort to bring the Polley Family Cemetery to its current dignified state. Through countless hours of clearing overgrown trees, brush, and weeds, to calling together descendants and local friends who all had an interest in honoring Joseph Henry Polley and his family with a respectful resting place, the Grammers built what would become the Polley Association.



Edward and Nick Uhlig, Keith Johnson, and Eric Fryer contributed to building the fence around the cemetery and erecting the flagpole. Claudia and Gary Goldman donated the Polley Cemetery sign, and Mary Lou Featherston and Glenna Hamley donated the flag that flies over the cemetery. Their contributions and the donations from all Polley Association members have kept the cemetery in great shape ever since.

While the primary purpose of the Polley Association is to care for the Polley Family Cemetery, we also can't help but to continue the Polley memory through research and story-sharing. Members such as Janice Frost, Dianne Perry, Mary Lou Featherston, George Bert and Peggy Everts, and so many others have filled in the colorful family history with stories and records.

It is a joy to meet fellow Polley descendants and learn about their family line, as well as helping them to place their ancestry within the larger Polley family legacy. It is an even greater delight to meet together with other Polley family members at reunions at the Polley Mansion and pay respects to our ancestors at the cemetery across the road.

From the hard work that John and Shirley Grammer began a little over 15 years ago, the Polley Association has grown in size and scope. We continue to honor the resting place for our ancestors while restoring the family history and building connections between descendants.



*Above: Polley Cemetery before clean up and restoration*



*Right: Polley Cemetery in 2012*

## Polley Family Reunion

We will gather to hear the stories of some of our Polley ancestors, meet with fellow Polley descendants, learn about some of the myths and legends that attend the Polley legacy, and dedicate several restored family headstones at local cemeteries, including the Polley Family Cemetery across the street from the mansion.

Keith and Robin Muschalek have graciously offered to host the reunion at the Polley Mansion, and we are thrilled to reconnect with all of our Polley friends and family in the old family home!

Invitations will be coming as we get closer to the event, including details about where to stay and local information for your trip to Wilson County. You can also find this information on our website ([www.PolleyAssociation.org](http://www.PolleyAssociation.org)) beginning in late summer 2020. Should this event need to be cancelled or postponed due to the health, travel, or safety concerns of our family members, we will announce that on the Polley Association website in late summer 2020.

**We need your help!** We want to include as many Polley descendants as would like to attend, but we need updated contact information to send them an invitation. So please pass along word of the reunion to your family members, and encourage them to sign up with the Polley Association!

Find Us Online...

[www.PolleyAssociation.org](http://www.PolleyAssociation.org)