



Message from the President

Katherine Goldberg

For me, it all started with a newspaper clipping. In 1994, my dad, Duncan Hall, shared a story from the *Houston Chronicle's* Lifestyle section entitled, "The Legends of Brit Bailey." On the top of the article he wrote in pen, "Your 5x Great Grandfather." As I read the story about one of Texas' earliest pioneers, I could not believe that I was related to such an interesting character! I was hooked, and I had to find out more.

Britt Bailey came to Texas with his family and all he owned in 1818, in search of adventure and opportunity. The legends about him abound. Stories about fist fighting with locals for the fun of it, making an itinerant preacher 'dance' on the table by shooting at his feet for Bailey's own entertainment, and making peace with local tribes of Natives were all fascinating stories to me as a child.

While Britt Bailey is a Texas Legend, he is also the father of Mary Bailey Polley, our own Polley Association matriarch. Mary was a head-strong and independent girl of nine years-old at the time her father brought her to Texas. Her most formative years were spent surviving the wagon trek from East Tennessee to New Orleans, crossing Galveston Island within sight of the Maison Rouge, famous home the pirate Jean Lafitte, surviving endless mosquitoes and more wagon travel to their new homestead in Spanish-owned Texas, only to have it change to Mexican-owned Texas within a couple of years. Once at their homestead, the family had to rely on their own hands for any needs they faced, as they would be the only settlers in the area for more than 3 years. And that says nothing of Mary's later courtship and 3 weddings to Joseph Henry Polley, her role in the Texas Revolution, her 11 children, her move west as an early cattle baroness, and so much more.



These stories were full of adventure, hardship, courage, perseverance, and humor. I was enthralled with every new bit I learned. It is these stories that place our ancestors into the wider history that we all learn in school, and our connection to our relatives gives us a connection to that history as well. It is no longer abstract, the thing of textbooks or curriculums, but real people and places that formed the foundation of the society we live in today.

So how do we entice the next generation to carry on the legacy of the family? By telling our stories and the stories that have been passed down to us, of course. By sharing the newspaper articles, and casually mentioning the ghost to 10 year-old kids.

As we look forward to the next Polley Reunion, I encourage you to dig out the old artifacts and articles that were passed down, remember the stories, and come ready to share your story with the family.

110 Years Young

Hannah New Spivey, the granddaughter of Harriett Roxanna Polley Houston, and oldest living Polley relative turned 110 this past November. Hannah was born in 1910 in La Vernia, Texas to Tilmon Tennessee New and Elizabeth "Lizzie" Houston New (daughter of Harriet Roxanna Polley).

She certainly has seen quite a lot of changes to the world in her 110 years, which began before the First World War. In 1928, Hannah married Thomas Troy Spivey and together they had one daughter, Adele. Interestingly, Adele would go on to marry Arthur Conrad (Connie) Goeth Jr., who grew up in the Polley Mansion in the 1920's and 30's.

Hannah and her husband (who was a drummer), loved music and dancing. A legacy they have passed down in their musically talented family. Her other hobbies and talents include crochet, which she enjoyed into her early 100's, and her excellent cooking.



FUN FACT:

Hannah's baptism gown hangs in an upper bedroom at Whitehall.

*Left: Hannah Spivey at the 2017 Polley Reunion
Right: Hannah as an infant.*

Many of us were lucky to meet Hannah in person at the 2017 Polley Family Reunion and it was indeed a treat to chat with her.

Hannah is currently living in the La Vernia, Texas area and being cared for by her family. Ms. Hannah, you are an inspiration to us all!

If you would like to read more about Hannah Spivey's 110th birthday celebration, you can check out the La Vernia News article from November 2020, here:

<https://www.lavernianews.com/articles/hannah-new-spivey-to-celebrate-110-years/>

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 August 31st. You can do this by credit card online by going to www.PolleyAssociation.org/get-involved, or you can mail a check to:

Melissa Lingwall
3326 Dunes Circle
Montgomery, Texas 77356

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 we are happy to report that the cemetery is in very good shape. Mr. Lupe Campos continues to mow the grass regularly and take care of any small maintenance that arises.

This summer, the wildflowers were bountiful in the area and spring rains helped keep the grass green. The tidy cemetery has an American flag waving on the pole and is a place of calm and peace.

Last year, we approved the purchase of four new headstones to replace headstones with incorrect or missing information. Those corrected stones were placed in this past year.

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

Officers

President - Katherine Goldberg
Vice President - Melinda Kilian
Secretary - Claudia Goldman
Treasurer - Melissa Lingwall

Thank you Shirley Grammer!

It was 2005 when Shirley and John Grammer formed the Polley Association, along with several Polley descendants, to provide maintenance for the Polley Family cemetery in Wilson County, Texas. For the last 16 years, Shirley has served the Polley Association in various capacities, including her latest role as Treasurer. She will be stepping down from that role this year as she and John move to East Texas to be near family.

It is difficult to describe what Shirley means to the Polley Association, because she has been the heart and soul of everything we do. It was Shirley's dedication that restored broken and damaged headstones, and Shirley's sense of duty that fought for historical markers, and Shirley's warm and welcoming personality that united Polley descendants from all over the country to help preserve the legacy of the Polley family.

Her tireless research led her to write many newspaper articles commemorating Polley family members and their importance. It has also culminated in an impressive collection of articles, obituaries, and stories about our Polley ancestors, both near and far. Her generosity continues as she has donated her Polley research collection to Whitehall, so that family members may schedule a visit and have access to the information.

As John and Shirley transition out to East Texas, we wish them many blessings. I speak for the whole Polley Association when I say that we are forever grateful for their commitment to preserving local history and honoring our ancestors.



Shirley Grammer

Welcome Melissa Lingwall!

We would like to welcome Melissa Lingwall to the Polley Association Board as our new Treasurer.



Melissa Lingwall

My sister, Melinda (Vice President of the Polly Association), and I are the great great granddaughters of Susan Rebecca Polley. An interesting and touching bit of history is the following: In 1858 Susan Rebecca Polley married Connally Findlay Henderson who died at the Battle of Gaines Mill on June 27, 1862. Remarkably, Susan Rebecca was with child when he died. She gave birth to our great grandmother on December 7, 1862. To honor her father, the baby was named Connally Findlay. She was our dad's grandmother.

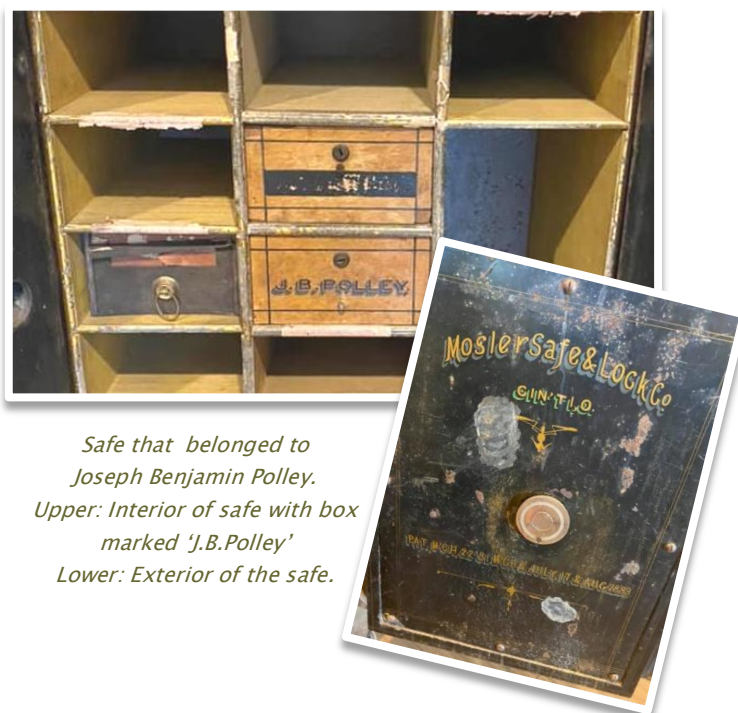
We grew up in Crystal City, Texas, about 135 miles west of Sutherland Springs, daughters of Joseph Sheldon Laird and Mary Jane Erskine. We heard stories of our Polley ancestors and the family home on the Cibolo Creek, as well as stories about the Erskine side of the family who also settled not far from Seguin and the beautiful Guadalupe River. The Polleys and Erskines must have known one another! In fact, there is a legal document that Shirley Grammer located and copied in which Connally F. Henderson conducted a transaction with Joseph H. Polly (sic) dated January 5th, 1860 and was witnessed by our great great grandfather, Andrew Nelson Erskine. We grew up 135 miles west, but love for Wilson and Guadalupe counties, Seguin and the Guadalupe River, and Cibolo Creek runs deep in our hearts. It is an honor to be part of the Association. I will do my best to represent our family well.

My husband of 45 years, Chris, and I are retired. We moved last July from the Dallas area to Montgomery, Texas. Since moving here we are closer to our son Patrick and his wife Madeline who live in Houston, and also closer to our daughter Mary Catherine who lives in New Orleans.

Updates from the Polley Mansion

The Polley Mansion continues to receive excellent love and care from owners Keith and Robin Muschalek. They were able to work on quite a few projects during the pandemic, including replacing and leveling several floors, repairing the upper front porch that spans the full width of the home, and repairing all seven fireplaces and the stone cistern.

Keith and Robin were contacted last year about a large safe that was owned by Joseph Benjamin Polley. It was purchased by Mike Branecky, from Flatonia, Texas, in the early 1990's from the Linne Estate (the Linne's owned the home for the latter 20th Century). The safe was probably used in J. B. Polley's law practice in Floresville, Texas. The Muschalek's took the opportunity to bring the safe back to the Polley Mansion. It has "J. B. Polley" clearly labeled on an inside shelf. What a find!



*Safe that belonged to Joseph Benjamin Polley.
Upper: Interior of safe with box marked 'J.B. Polley'
Lower: Exterior of the safe.*



*Upper Left:
Polley Mansion in snow Feb. 2021*

Below: Peach Tree behind cook house

Lower Left: Heritage Garden 2021

February of 2021 brought incredibly cold temperatures to Texas, and a good dusting of snow fell across the landscape at Whitehall creating a rare wonderland scene. Temperatures dipped to 8°, which, as you can imagine, is very rare for South Texas.

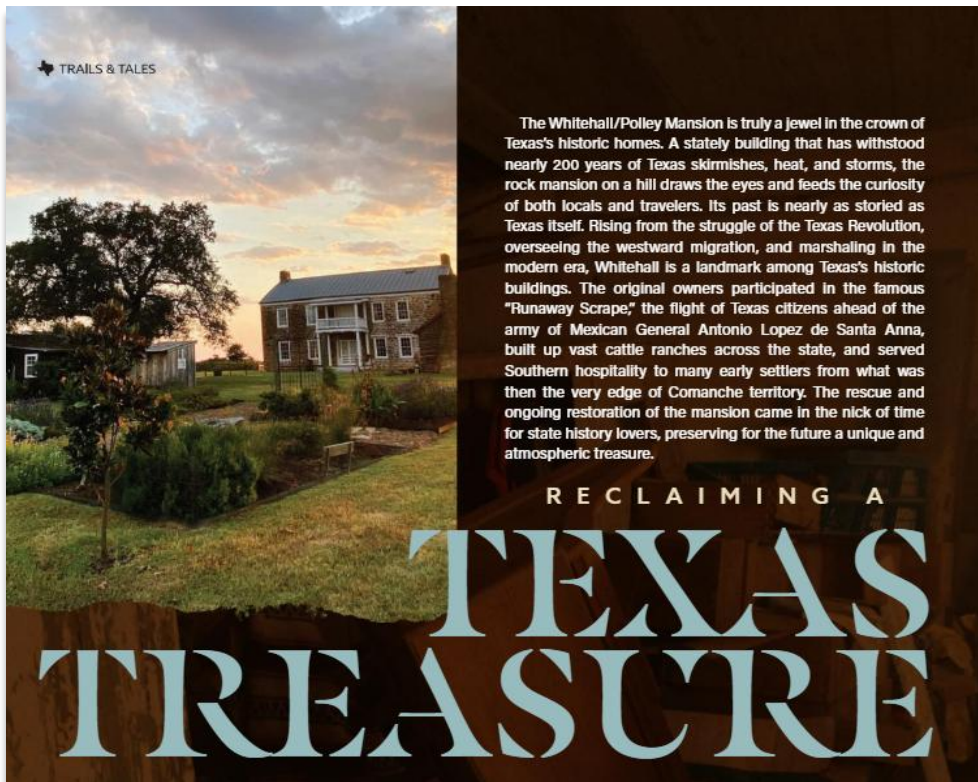
The Muschaleks have continued to plant more trees on the property, including a couple of peach trees in honor of Mary Bailey Polley who was known for her peach preserves. The Heritage Garden, which is sponsored by the Guadalupe County Master Gardeners, continues to thrive with herbs and native plants.

Tour groups and visitors enjoy scheduling small tours of the mansion, and the charming patina of the old home has made it a very popular location for photography sessions, especially for bridal portraits. While the mansion is not open to the general public for weddings, Robin's family enjoyed her brother's wedding at Whitehall in November. It is so good to see the mansion alive with celebration!

Follow along with Polley Mansion updates on Facebook at:

[www.Facebook.com/PolleyMansion](https://www.facebook.com/PolleyMansion)

Polley Mansion Story in Print



This spring, the Polley Mansion was featured in the March/April 2021 issue of *Texas Living Magazine* with an article entitled "Reclaiming a Texas Treasure." The article written by Diane Adams highlighted the hard work that Keith and Robin Muschalek have put into the restoration and rejuvenation of Whitehall in the last 6 years. Transforming the crumbling junk yard that they purchased in 2015, into the well-kept, loved, and beautifully restored property that sits proudly overlooking the Cibolo once again, the Muschaleks have done what we all worried wasn't possible. While Robin points out in the article that much work still remains to be done, the attention that Whitehall has received from publications like *Texas Living* show that this Texas treasure truly has been reclaimed and redeemed. Hats off to Keith and Robin for the great article and for all they do!



Melinda Creech Shares Polley History



Many of you read in a previous Polley Association newsletter that we have a new Polley Association scholar on the scene in Melinda Creech. Melinda received a Masters Degree from Baylor University with her thesis, *The Material Culture of the Polley Mansion*. This past February, Melinda had the opportunity to present her thesis at the David B. Warren Symposium sponsored by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts (which she streamed via Zoom from on location at the Polley Mansion!).

In May 2021, she was able to present her thesis virtually at the Vernacular Architecture Forum's Conference.

Way to go Melinda! Thank you for helping to increase awareness of the Polley Family and congratulations on the success of your academic work.

Polley Sleuths Needed!

Calling all detectives! In the renovations at Polley Mansion a few burning questions have come up for which there are no apparent answers. We need your expertise to help solve the mysteries below...

1) Where was the Stake House located?

We know the Polley family lived in a smaller stake house (made of vertical posts, or stakes) while Polley Mansion was being built between 1847 and 1853. Was the stake house located close to the Cibolo River for easy access to water, or was the stake house located closer to where the mansion currently stands, farther back from the river. We know the family survived historic flooding along the Brazos River before moving to the Cibolo, which may have affected their preference. Or, is there another location entirely?

2) When was the interior staircase built?

There are several indications that the interior staircase was not original to the home (the staircase wall runs into the middle of a 2nd story window, etc.). Many homes of the era had exterior staircases to the second floor. One theory is that the staircase was added after Joseph Polley died, when Mary Bailey Polley was hosting borders at the home. What information might you have about the age and installation of the interior staircase at Polley Mansion?

3) Did Robert E. Lee ever stay at Whitehall?

According to the historical marker on the Polley Mansion, Robert E. Lee wrote his last letter from Texas at the Polley Mansion as he headed back East to lead the Army of Northern Virginia in the Civil War. However, there is no record of this letter. There is record that he stayed in the town of Sutherland Springs at Mrs. Sutherland's home on his way back East and wrote a final letter from her home in February 1861. Any other reference to Polley Mansion seems to come from hopeful, but not historical, sources. Do you have any evidence that that Robert E. Lee stayed at the Polley Mansion at any point in time?

If you know the answers to any of these questions, or have any clues that could help in the quest, please let us know at PolleyAssociation@gmail.com



Polley Family Reunion 2017

Polley Family Reunion

Take two! While 2020 turned out to be a bad year for a family reunion, we think 2022 will be just the ticket! This will hopefully enable everyone to travel safely and freely without concern or restriction.

We will gather to hear about the building of the Polley Mansion and life at Whitehall in its heyday during the 1850's. Everyone will get the opportunity to tour the mansion and hear the wonderful story of its modern day revival. Bring your family stories so that we can all share in the Polley legacy and enjoy our time gathered at the family homestead.

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) beginning in Fall 2021.

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