



Blucher:

**A Family, a Legacy, and a Research Resource at
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi**

Thomas H. Kreneck

With the Collaboration of Lori Atkins
& Research Assistance by Amanda Kowalski

Dedicated to

*Conrad M. and Zula Hill Blucher,
Claudia Blucher Harrel, Mary Julia Blucher Jordan,
Medora and George A. Blucher, Jr., Gloria Blucher Alexander,
as well as William W. (Bill) and Patricia Green.
Generous donors and fine people.*

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Blucher: A Family, a Legacy, and a Research Resource
at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

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University-Corpus Christi.



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Thomas H. Kreneck
San Antonio, Texas

Introduction

Beginning in the 1840s, the name Blucher became identified, in some ways synonymous, with Corpus Christi and its history. A pioneer German American family, the Bluchers made numerous contributions to the city's development, culture, and urban environs over four generations. They were especially remarkable in the land surveying profession starting from the first decade of the city's origins until the present. One of the family's principal contributions, however, was the founding of a remarkable research resource in the Special Collections & Archives Department of the Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

This publication seeks to explain concisely who the Bluchers were, outline some of their most important imprints on the city, highlight their mark on surveying, and give attention to their broader donations to A&M-Corpus Christi, including establishment of the Conrad Blucher Institute

for Surveying and Science (CBI). It will especially reveal the development of the massive body of research materials that bear their name and are housed within the library's Special Collections. To do so, it will narrate the story of the Blucher collection, its proper title being the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers (Blucher Family Papers), and of the series within those holdings called the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection (CBSC). More to the point, this work chronicles the entire collection's growth from the first paper donations by the family to the University in the 1980s until that institution made substantial portions of the CBSC accessible to researchers on the Internet.

Hopefully, by conveying a basic understanding of the Corpus Christi Bluchers over several generations and by describing their public gifts to research, this study, with captioned illustrations, will foster further scholarly examination of this important family. It might also enhance continued use of these robust materials by the variety of audiences they address, not the least of which are professional surveyors. By presenting a fact-based archival history of the massive Blucher Family Papers and the CBSC, it likewise will preserve an accurate account of the accessioning and handling of these items by A&M-Corpus Christi as well as give credit to the people who created those records and the individuals who generously donated them to the University. In doing so, the narrative may assist curators in working with similar large family papers and/or surveying records.

Felix and Maria von Blucher: Origins

The Blucher saga in the Lone Star state — of which the Blucher Family Papers and its CBSC series are a part — began with Felix von Blucher immigrating to Texas in the mid-1840s. As summarized by Bruce S. Cheeseman, perhaps the keenest student on the Blucher family roots, Anton Felix Hans Hellmuth von Blucher (aka Felix Blucher) was born into Prussian nobility in 1819 on an estate owned by his family near Poggelow in present-day northern Germany. Blucher claimed an illustrious lineage. He could count among his forbears a grand uncle named Gehard Lebrecht von Blucher, a General and hero at the Battle of Waterloo who was crucial in Napoleon's defeat. Felix's own father, Karl Wilhelm von Blucher, held the rank of captain of Prussian cavalry, thus sealing Felix's martial tradition. ¹

By 1838, Felix had enrolled in the prestigious Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universitat in Berlin, where he earned distinction as an outstanding student in law, civil engineering, and languages. In 1845, he graduated with two advanced

university degrees which qualified him as an attorney, surveyor, as well as a linguist; he would eventually command six languages and serve as a translator and interpreter. Felix was a highly literate individual. ²

At some point before he finished his studies, Felix met and became entranced with Maria Augusta Imme, the daughter of upper middle-class parents named Carl Friedrich and Marie Auguste Imme, owners of a Berlin brass foundry. Born in 1827, Maria was attractive and charming. She was educated, too, having studied literature and music with private instructors. Family tradition held that she had at one time studied piano and music under the German master Franz Liszt. Her popular appeal was so outstanding, one of her grandsons was later told, that Maria was regarded as “the Belle of Berlin.” She returned Felix’s overtures. She saw him as a young, handsome man of dash and promise. Like her suitor, Maria was erudite, and would become a thoughtful, prolific letter writer. ³

But Felix’s politics derailed any marriage plans. He had become radicalized at the university. His anti-monarch tendencies brought him into disfavor with authorities so that in August 1845, he had to flee Prussia for the United States. Landing in New Orleans with little money, Felix did what he could to get by, tutoring German, serving as the accountant for his hotel keeper, and finally working in a local shipyard as a draftsman. In the spirit of Americanization, he even altered his name to Felix Anton Blucher. From his earliest days, Felix wrote home about his doings in his new country. ⁴

In 1846, Felix relocated to Texas to assist Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels as a surveyor and linguist in building the latter's settlement. Famously, Felix served as the interpreter of and signatory to an 1847 treaty drawn up between the Comanche Indians and the German settlers between the San Sabá and Llano Rivers. ⁵

During part of the war with Mexico (1846-1848), Felix used his skills to interpret for the United States army. He made good wages doing so, but left service prior to the war ending. In this time period, Felix visited Corpus Christi where he met its founder, a frontier promoter named Henry Lawrence Kinney. They struck up a friendship. Felix had also decided to return to Prussia, commit himself to marry Maria Imme, and make Corpus Christi their home. A man of adventure, energy, and purpose, Felix A. Blucher cast his lot with South Texas, and his prospective spouse would do the same. ⁶

Felix accomplished all of his planned goals. In mid-February 1849, he made his way back to Berlin and managed to have a personal meeting with William I, the Prussian Prince, and to put himself in good standing with the royal authorities. In mid-March 1849, he and Maria wed and immediately began their passage to Texas. ⁷

Their journey from Berlin took them through Hamburg, thence by river to the North Sea. It took their vessel, a schooner named the *Elbe*, two months to navigate the difficult voyage across the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. They finally arrived in New Orleans, that humid, hodgepodge of humanity, in June 1849. Off shore at the Crescent City, as biographer Cheeseman notes, Maria penned the first of

hundreds of lengthy letters that she would write to her parents over the next thirty years. This correspondence later became fundamental documents for the Blucher Family Papers. ⁸

In early July, Felix and Maria made the week-long trip by small sailing vessel across the Gulf from New Orleans to Corpus Christi, where they landed on July 11, 1849, loaded down with their clothes and an array of items, including Maria's piano. To some people the barely 550-person settlement may have looked miserable, but not to the young couple. They joined a community of immigrants from England, Ireland, Germany, and Scotland as well as from other parts of the United States. They mixed also with the Mexican residents who came from the local hinterlands and overland from Mexico itself. ⁹

Felix quickly purchased an eight-acre tract from H. L. Kinney on the high bluff that stood above Corpus Christi Bay. This property became the Blucher homestead, what came to be known later as "Blucherville." According to their son Charles, a small two-room house built by a previous owner already stood there and into it the Blucher couple moved and made do. ¹⁰

Upon the acquisition, Felix and Maria commenced work in their new setting. Already known among the established folks in Corpus Christi, Felix would secure employment as a surveyor while Maria readily made her own friends and shouldered the burdens of maintaining a frontier cabin life. In 1852, the settlement incorporated as a town, with the Bluchers ranking among its most remarkable citizens for their energy and Old-World refinement, even despite the hardships they faced. ¹¹

Soon, they began a family. Maria gave birth to Maria Felicia (Mary) in 1851; Julia Augusta in 1853; Carl Friedrich Harvey (Charles) in 1856; Richard Paul in 1858; George Anton in 1861; and Anna Elizabeth in 1864. Emblematic of the tragedy that frontier immigrant people often endured, Anna Elizabeth was taken from them at one year of age in 1865, victim to the effects of dysentery.¹²

Felix's numerous and complex surveying activities could well be the subject of a full-length study on that profession in early Texas. He became a trusted, multi-talented, and legendary land surveyor. As scholar Gary Jeffress notes, Felix was actively surveying from the moment he arrived in Corpus Christi. On July 11, 1849, two days after he and Maria landed, Felix set off to do survey work for H. L. Kinney. In 1852, Felix was appointed as the Nueces County District Engineer (Surveyor), a time when the county extended from the Nueces River to parts of the Rio Grande. In 1858, he received appointment as Cameron County District Surveyor. In 1860, he obtained the position of Live Oak County Surveyor. He often was out across the broadest reaches of South Texas. As was customary in the profession, he would compile his surveying calculations in small field notebooks. He would also retain copies of the maps he drew from these measurements and other notations. The Blucher surveying collection had thus begun.¹³

Felix's long absences during most of their marriage placed a great burden on his wife, which historian Bruce Cheeseman details. Maria relied on her own resourcefulness to make ends meet; she had a yard filled with chickens, cows, and a garden from which she sold eggs, milk, and vegetables.

She even resorted to selling some of her family valuables. Maria became the quintessential resilient American frontier woman, shouldering the burdens of the home and farm by herself or with the aid of growing children and trusted local laborers. ¹⁴

Maria also relied heavily on materials and money she received from her parents in Prussia, solicited from them in the stream of long letters she wrote. Her correspondence was likewise filled with personal sentiments and the news of the day. Her parents dutifully responded, helping their distant daughter, her husband, and growing number of grandchildren. ¹⁵

The Civil War wreaked havoc on Corpus Christi and the Blucher household. Both Felix and Maria were ardent supporters of the Confederacy. Felix held the rank of major in the Southern forces and participated in the successful defense of the city when it was attacked in August 1862 by federal gunboats. The blockade by the Union navy beginning in 1863 caused poverty and deprivation on Maria and the children. To make matters worse, Felix left Corpus Christi to join the Confederate action under John S. "Rip" Ford then defending the lower Texas Gulf Coast. Maria had to fend for the homestead and children without his assistance. ¹⁶

With the coming of Reconstruction, the Bluchers persevered, even embracing the occupation forces. A Union officer named Lieutenant James Downing not only gave help to Maria and her children, but courted and wed Mary, the eldest Blucher daughter. Known as "Uncle Jim," Downing's memory of kindness was handed down in Blucher family tradition through recollections and photographs kept in their personal archives.

During the 1870s, Maria became renown as a local instructor of music and piano. Numerous students thus benefitted from her early training and Prussian culture. Maria also supplemented the family income by serving as a teacher of various languages. Always, she remained mindful of having her own children educated, a duty which continued the literate Blucher tradition.

In 1869, Julia went to Berlin to live for over a decade with her maternal grandparents. In the mid 1870s, even Maria returned to visit her parents for approximately a year. Both women thus refreshed the family's connection to its Prussian roots.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Felix's life was anything but sedentary and he continued to be an adventurist sort. With the Union victory, he became one of the ex-Confederates who crossed into Mexico and for a time joined the army of the ill-fated Maximilian. Though he returned to Corpus Christi for a time in the late 1860s, Felix soon resumed his work in the field as a surveyor, staying at length in the large home of his friend Captain Richard King, founder of the legendary King Ranch. Felix's surveying assignments during the early 1870s included the first attempt to build a narrow-gauge railroad from Corpus Christi to Laredo, an enterprise trying to link the emerging Texas port town with the interior of Mexico. By then he was employing his two oldest sons in his work. Felix's endeavors also carried him to Laredo, Zapata, Brownsville, and other points in the lower Rio Grande Valley. His surveying proved to be economically profitable. Always he made more notes, created more field books, and drew masterful maps, in the process increasing the written record of his time on the South Texas terrain.¹⁸

It was 1879 while on a surveying job for Richard King that Felix Blucher died unexpectedly in Cameron County of a lung condition. His son-in-law Jim Downing and Felix's son, Charles, retrieved the body for reburial in the family plot in Corpus Christi. Felix A. Blucher, restless spirit of the American frontier, was interred in the city which he had helped to develop.¹⁹

Having established her own brand of feminist frontier independence as head of her household in Corpus Christi, Maria lived for another decade and a half, as one of the town's founding mothers. During the 1870s, she, with financial help from Felix and that of her children, had established economic security. Maria remained in her home with her offspring living nearby. As biographer Cheeseman notes, she "continued to teach music, enjoyed her garden and pets, and delighted as she always had in the beauty and bounty of the bay and chaparral." She died in 1893, celebrated by all who knew her. Maria's obituary respectfully stated that she "was a woman of many noble traits and character and was always a friend to the distressed and needy." It concluded that "by her death another link in the chain which bound the Corpus Christi of the past to the Corpus Christi of the present is broken."²⁰

The Blucher Pioneer Legacy

While the founding Blucher couple had passed from the scene, their lives were not forgotten, enshrined as they were by subsequent generations of authors who viewed the Bluchers' experiences as a parable of immigration and frontier existence and of a refined quality. The Bluchers had contributed a foundational story to the historical consciousness of Corpus Christi and South Texas and it became perhaps their most enduring legacy.

Felix, Maria, and their children had been so well known that they became characters in a romantic novel by Richard Henry Savage entitled *For Life and Love: A Story of the Rio Grande*, published in 1893, the year of Maria's death. Born in 1842, Savage was a West Point graduate, a surveyor for the Army Corps of Engineers, and widely travelled. After leaving military service, Savage came to be acquainted with Felix and family as he worked with Blucher in trying to survey the initial route of the Corpus Christi and Rio

Grande railroad in 1874. On that project, Felix served as the principal surveyor, while Savage made the various field measurements. Savage soon left the area never to return.²¹

Richard Savage went on to pen some forty novels during his life. The prolific author was so impressed with Felix and his family that he cast them as characters in *For Life and Love*, which was billed as Savage's seventh book. Not even giving Felix a pseudonym, Savage vividly portrayed "Major von Blucher" as a "squared jawed old Prussian" and "the pride of the frontier." As if drawing a picture from life, he described Blucher as a "self-exiled German noble" who "spoke all languages." "Surveyor, engineer, lawyer, translator, scientist and advisor, his trenchant tongue was a flail to the unlearned." The Major was a man, according to novelist Savage, who had left Germany "to plunge into a wild Texan career." Savage further noted that "a gentle German lady presided over his home. Her graceful daughter portrayed the mother's refinement, his two stalwart boys were Texan copies of the sturdy von Blucher." In sum, Savage wrote: "Fearless, sturdy, and fate-defying, he [Major Blucher] smoked, drank, philosophized, and fraternized with every border passer-by..."²²

Felix and Maria's son Charles, one of the "two stalwart boys" apparently had acquired a copy of Savage's novel. Charles noted years later in the recollections he left in the Blucher Family Papers that he knew Savage well from their time together on the railroad venture.²³

The von Blucher story did not stop with Richard Henry Savage; the adventure became a staple of Corpus Christi's

past. The first history book written on the city, penned by Mary A. Sutherland and entitled *The Story of Corpus Christi* (1916), mentioned Felix von Blucher with pride. A member of the Daughters of the Confederacy, Sutherland noted that among the city's "foreign born citizens," the first among these "good and old names" to stand among the Confederate forces was "Von Blucher, of same family as he of Waterloo..." Subsequent popular histories of the city would mention the Blucher presence. ²⁴

In twentieth century newspaper recounting of Corpus Christi's past, Felix and Maria's role had its share of telling, almost as an epic of pioneering. In 1933, for example, *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* ran a full-length narrative entitled "Blucher Family Figures in History of Corpus Christi and South Texas Since the Arrival of Taylor in 1840s." It noted that "few families are as intertwined" with the development of the region as the Bluchers. In its 1952 centennial history reflections, the *Caller-Times* featured Felix and family in a series of articles about early South Texas notables. As always, attention was paid to the Blucher surveying tradition. ²⁵

“Blucherville”: An Enduring Family Name

The children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of Felix and Maria not only contributed to the ongoing remembrance of their family, but they also carried the von Blucher name and spirit of accomplishment into the twentieth century and beyond. Their story, one that spans over four generations and speaks to the issue of acculturation and German Texan history, waits to be fully explored by scholars.

Chief among the family's contributions to the Corpus Christi physical urban landscape was the original eight-acre homestead that by the early twentieth century had come to be known as “Blucherville.” It ultimately included five major residences for Felix and Maria's children. Most prominent of these edifices and the ones that remain until this writing are the homes of Charles, Richard, and George. All facing Carrizo Street near the corner with Blucher Street, these three houses retain their impressive elegance.

Begun in 1880 as a modest structure, the Charles F. H. von Blucher home was added onto and remodeled so that by 1909 it ranked among the most magnificent examples of Victorian-type architecture in the city. Richard and George constructed their homes in 1901 and 1904, respectively. As Corpus Christi historian Murphy Givens points out, though these stately residences have gone on to commercial and cultural use, they contribute mightily to the city's built environment, still standing in their original locations on the bluff overlooking Corpus Christi Bay where the parents had settled so many decades before.²⁶

Felix and Maria's children, who all lived well into the twentieth century in Corpus Christi, kept up the Blucher name and traditions, and had productive lives. Locals considered them respected, substantial citizens, granting them the greatest compliment that could be paid to members of any community. Mary, the character described by Savage in his novel as Maria's "graceful daughter," was widowed with the death of James Downing in 1891. But she remarried Charles A. Meuly in 1900, who was from another prominent German American Corpus Christi family, and had ranch land near Hebbronville. She died in 1918 at age sixty-seven. Julia returned to Corpus Christi in 1880 and lived a single life in her own cottage in Blucherville until her death in 1937. Julia was well known for reportedly owning the first automobile in the city and for such activities as being a founding member of La Retama Club, which established the town's first library. Richard, the other of Felix's "two stalwart boys" noted by Savage, also helped with the family

surveying work, but made a living as a railroad machinist and mechanic. He married and remained in his native city until he died in 1926. George gained recognition by operating the Lone Star Ice Company. He passed away in 1929. Richard and George had descendants who would also reside in Corpus Christi and other parts of Texas. ²⁷

Charles F. H. von Blucher

In the Blucher surveying and archival legacies, Charles von Blucher, the third issue of the Felix and Maria marriage, figures most prominently. Like his parents, Carl Friedrich Harvey (Charles) attracted the public eye from the nineteenth century forward. He carried on the profession that cemented the Blucher name in South Texas. With his wife Mary Meuly, he

is also the most germane in building the archives of the family and the times in which his generation lived.

While his father and mother had received the finest education in the Old World, Charles was given the best of



Charles F. H. von Blucher, ca. 1880.

what a Texas frontier town had to offer. At first, he and his siblings were tutored at home by their mother, where she taught them primary subjects, languages, and music, with the instruction being in German. She also instilled in Charles — as in all her children — a respect for literacy and culture that was a Blucher tradition.

After this home learning, Charles attended private schools, such as were available. From the mid-1860s until the early 1870s, Charles sequentially enrolled in at least a half dozen private institutions. They were conducted in people's residences, churches, and other buildings around town. The breadth of instruction varied as did the length of each school's existence. One of these institutes was the Hidalgo Seminary, run by a Catholic priest where Charles studied numerous subjects, including arithmetic and geography. Another school, in the Methodist church, was taught by the minister and his wife. Charley, as he was often called, ended his education in the early 1870s in another location with an expanded curriculum taught by a Mr. Hanna, who would later turn it into Corpus Christi's initial public school. Charles was always a diligent pupil as was expected of a Blucher child.²⁸

By 1872, Charles worked full time with Felix, who proudly stated that his son displayed the makings of "an excellent surveyor." Though he did not have the artistic map-making abilities Felix possessed (few did), at sixteen years of age the robust Charles had outstanding skills and a steady work ethic. Charles served as rodman

for Richard Savage in mapping the Corpus Christi to Rio Grande railroad line with Felix in 1874. Thus, Charles had many memorable experiences during an important era of South Texas surveying.²⁹

When, after Felix's death, the famous railroad promoter Uriah Lott took over the second attempt at establishing the rail line between Corpus Christi and Laredo, Lott tried to enlist Charles as the engineer for the project. Though at first he declined, Charles eventually conceded. Once again, however, Charles did not get paid, and later reflected "I quit railroad surveying ... and went into land surveying," at which he would excel.³⁰

However, Charles found employment, working for some time, with the railroad interests of the Mexican National Construction Company. As the firm's "receiving and forwarding clerk" he moved to Nuevo Laredo to facilitate goods that had arrived from Louisiana in route to Mexico via Corpus Christi. By then, in 1880, he had married a Corpus Christi woman, Mary Ellen Meuly, the sister of Charles A. Meuly who would become Charles Blucher's own sister Mary's second husband in 1900.

Charles and Mary Ellen von Blucher resided for a while in Nuevo Laredo where, as Charles recollected, they "had a very good time associating with the civilian population, the nice people of that place." Charles soon resigned from that position and moved with his wife back to Corpus Christi, where as he noted, they lived "happily ever afterwards."³¹

Back in his hometown, Charles von Blucher would embark upon a new departure: that of holding elective

office. Public involvement had been in Charles' blood. As a teenager in the early 1870s, he had served in the Corpus Christi volunteer fire department and remained a member for a number of years, though his work had often carried him out of town. He and Mary Ellen had already set up housekeeping in the small home they initially built in Blucherville when they married.³²

With widespread recognition through his family name and his individual accomplishments, Charles ran for and won election as Nueces County Surveyor in 1882, thus carrying on in the family tradition established by his father in the early 1850s. He would become even more respected. His offices were located in the new courthouse after it was built in 1914. As an independent practitioner, he would survey many of the emerging Corpus Christi suburbs. He worked for such important individuals as Phillip and J.O. Chapman to map the extensive farming enterprise that would come to be called Chapman Ranch in Nueces County. He ventured further out to plat farm lots and garden tracts in such small towns as Realitos, Bishop, and other villages, as well as establishing roadway routes connecting the population centers. He determined the boundaries of ranching lands such as the Palo Blanco Grant and in the harsh country of Brooks County and beyond. Keen students of the Blucher tradition, W. J. (Bill) Sames and Gary Jeffress, have noted: "Charles, like his father, was away from home considerably, living out in the brush, surveying. The life of a surveyor of those times was outdoors, camp fires at night, and hard labor." One comes away sensing that Charles F. H. von

Blucher was a rugged individual. He served as the Nueces County Surveyor for over fifty years, retiring in 1934.³³

Charles and Mary Ellen had a rich homelife in their impressive house, where they raised their children to adulthood, four of whom lived into their nineties. The siblings included four sons and one daughter: Carl F. K. von Blucher (1882-1972), Conrad Meuly Blucher (1885-1977), George A. Blucher (1886-1982), Marie M. Blucher (1890-1986), and Richard A. Blucher (1893-1976). All of them earned university degrees and went on to live successful lives. While at college, their parents required them each to write at least one letter home per week, continuing the literate Blucher tradition. Their mother saved this correspondence which eventually became a part of the family papers.³⁴

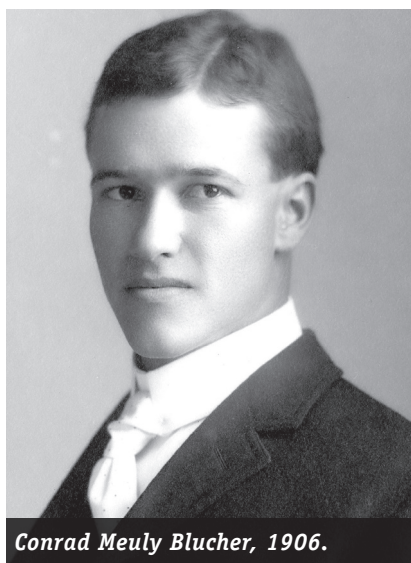
None of these children contributed more to the Corpus Christi cultural milieu than Charles and Mary's only daughter, Marie Marguerite Blucher. She was appointed as the first paid head of Corpus Christi's La Retama Public Library in 1914 when she was in her twenties; she served in that capacity through the trauma of the city's devastating hurricane of 1919. In 1920, she left that position, but according to Herb Canales, longtime director of the Corpus Christi Public Libraries, thereafter convinced numerous prominent families to donate their historical papers to the library. In that quest, Marie created a significant archival and manuscript repository of Corpus Christi and South Texas history. She also maintained many of her family's personal and business-related documents at the Charles

Blucher home where she lived for the rest of her long life. ³⁵

Heavily influenced by family tradition, the four sons of Charles and Mary Ellen graduated as engineers. Their eldest Carl worked as a surveyor, mainly in Southwest Texas and consulting for oil companies. Moving to Austin, Carl ended his successful career as the Chief Engineer of the Texas General Land Office. Richard and George trained as electrical engineers and entered the profession. Richard also engaged in a stellar banking career in Corpus Christi, while George spent time as a rancher. ³⁶

Conrad Meuly Blucher

It would be Conrad, the second oldest child, however, who took over from his father Charles as Nueces County Surveyor. Conrad was a likely choice, having the Blucher tradition at his back and being a thoroughly competent surveyor in his own right. He had graduated from Corpus Christi High School in 1902 as the class valedictorian. He went on to the University of Texas where he earned his degree in civil engineering in 1906. Returning to Corpus Christi, Conrad worked with Charles, but also spent several years as assistant City Engineer. During World War I, Conrad bolstered his skills



Conrad Meuly Blucher, 1906.

by serving briefly as a first lieutenant of engineers in the United States Army. By the late 1920s, he was head of his own firm, Blucher Engineering Company, which was well known around the city and county. When his father decided to retire in 1934 as County Surveyor after approximately a half century, Conrad succeeded him in that elected office.³⁷

Within a few years of Charles' death in 1938, Conrad, along with his mother Mary, led the family in making another major contribution to the urban landscape. Charles had named his widow and son Conrad as his co-executors. With total family involvement, in 1942 the Blucher descendants donated to the city all the land of the original homestead across Carrizo Street toward the bay (approximately 3.65 acres) to create Blucher Park. They gave the property in memory of Charles and intended it as a sanctuary for native plants and flowers existing nowhere else in Corpus Christi. The newspaper reported that: "The donors want Blucher Park to stay a place of quiet and meditation, a bird sanctuary and a spot where residents may go for a quiet tour ..." It was to be a natural setting in perpetuity, very much in keeping with progressive public discourse on urban living. Blucher Park was also reminiscent of Maria von Blucher's earliest observations of the natural beauty of the region's flora and fauna. The park emerged among the well-known destinations visited by bird watchers on what is called "The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail along the Central Flyway."³⁸

Conrad retained the position of Nueces County Surveyor

through election from 1934 until he retired in 1954, thus extending the Blucher presence in that office to an almost unbroken chain of one hundred years extending back to 1852 from when his grandfather Felix first began. Conrad also owned, managed, and continued to build the family surveying records developed over the years by Felix and Charles and since housed in the County Surveyor's office. That body of documents would also contain Conrad Blucher's materials and bear his name for posterity.

The Blucher influence in the County Surveyor's office was perpetuated when Conrad's assistant and protégé William W. (Bill) Green succeeded him in 1954. The Blucher surveying records would remain at the courthouse because Conrad had left them under Bill Green's care. Green would hold elective office until 1994.³⁹

Conrad Blucher's career was capped by multiple achievements and recognitions. In 1949, he had been a founding partner of Blucher and Naismith, Inc., a group of consulting engineers. He formally remained with that prestigious firm until the late 1960s when it became Naismith Engineering, Inc., but he still maintained a retirement office at the business. Conrad was named by the Texas Surveyors Association as its 1967 surveyor of the year. In 1974, he received the award of engineer of the year from the Texas Society of Professional Engineers. He had, over decades, served the TSA and TSPE prominently and faithfully on the state and local levels. He held membership in engineering honor societies and was designated as a fellow by the American Society of Civil Engineers.⁴⁰

The Blucher Bequest to the University

Conrad's crowning beneficence came in 1975, when he and his wife Zula E. Hill Blucher donated their estate to Texas A&I University at Corpus Christi. (Located on Ward Island, A&I-Corpus Christi was the public university which had once been the Baptist institution named the University of Corpus Christi. In turn, A&I-Corpus Christi would become Corpus Christi State University which subsequently changed its name to Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.) Their gift would serve educational purposes.

Conrad and Zula Blucher's donation involved a complex, evolving procedure, the details of which are outside the scope of this essay. However, according to authors Sames and Jeffress as well as other sources, this contribution commenced in mid-1975 with negotiations among the Bluchers, A&I-Corpus Christi President D. Whitney Halladay, and representatives of the Texas A&I Development Foundation, Inc., an independent organization that existed

solely for the benefit of the University. By the end of the year, Conrad and Zula had signed over their home on Ocean Drive to the Foundation, while retaining a life's estate. The sale of the house was to be used for the creation at the University of the "Conrad Blucher Fund for the Advancement of Science and Technology." The initial use of this fund was to establish a teaching professorship called the "Blucher Chair of Surveying." ⁴¹

Amid much publicity, President Halladay accepted the gift as the University's first endowment at a ceremony honoring the Blucher couple in January 1976. The fund, Halladay noted, would further the instruction of engineering technology. Evoking the Blucher tradition, Halladay stated: "Conrad Blucher has spent his lifetime, as did his forefathers, in advancing the profession of engineering in South Texas." ⁴²

In his Will, Conrad Blucher left much of the rest of his estate to the Texas A&I Development Foundation, Inc. "to be a part of the 'Conrad Blucher Fund for the Advancement of Science and Technology.'" What largesse came as a result of this bequest after Conrad and Zula died in 1977 and 1985, respectively (Zula having retained a life's estate), was South Texas ranch land, its oil producing mineral rights, and various other possessions that benefitted the University. The fund totaled around two million dollars and continued to grow into a multi-million-dollar principal. ⁴³

This endowment made possible the establishment of the "Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science" (CBI) on what by then was the Corpus Christi State University (CCSU) campus. Dedicated in May 1987, the Blucher Institute

had as its stated purpose: “To emphasize the importance of surveying research and education.” The CBI moved into a permanent building of its own in 1989. It would, in the words of Sames and Jeffress, conduct “research and education activities in Geographic Information Science (Geomatics, the modern term used for surveying and mapping, and geographic information systems — GIS) and in coastal and estuarine processes.” The CBI would work in conjunction with the curriculum ultimately developed at CCSU for training surveyors. Truly, the gift made by Conrad and Zula Blucher represented a continuation of the Blucher surveying spirit that had begun in Corpus Christi in 1849 and reflected the Blucher respect for education that started with Conrad’s forebears in Prussia. ⁴⁴

Importantly, too, Conrad Blucher’s 1977 Will stated: “My books, maps and surveying records may, of course, be delivered to the said university for its use.” This simple sentence would have great implications for the Special Collections & Archives and for the preservation of much Texas history documentation. ⁴⁵

Blucher: A Family, a Legacy, and a Research Resource
at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi



Wedding Portrait of Maria Augusta Imme and Felix A. von Blucher, ca. 1849, German immigrants to Texas and founders of the Corpus Christi Blucher Family. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Painting of the original home of Felix and Maria von Blucher on the eight acres of land that overlooked Corpus Christi Bay and that would come to be called "Blucherville." Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Felix A. Blucher, Corpus Christi pioneer, Confederate veteran, and noted land surveyor, ca. 1875. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Felix A. Blucher and his surveying party in South Texas accompanied by Reconstruction-era Union soldiers, ca. early 1870s. Blucher is standing in front of the tent entrance. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



TH. PRÜMM, BERLIN

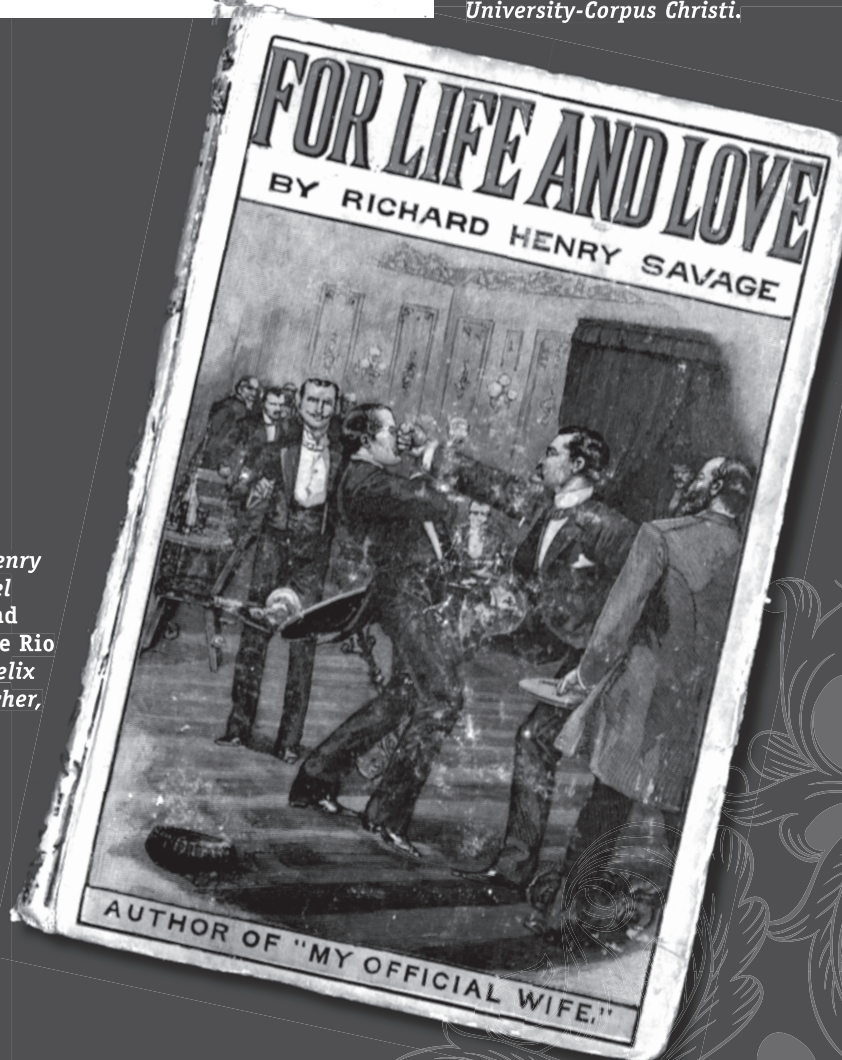
Maria Augusta Imme von Blucher, ca. 1874-1875, viewed by her Corpus Christi contemporaries as "a lady of rare musical talent" and as an embodiment of refined Prussian culture. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Julia Augusta von Blucher, ca. 1880, who preserved her mother's letters to Berlin and many other documents of the family archives. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Charles F.H. von Blucher surveying crew, 1876. Standing l. to r.: Richard P. von Blucher, chain carrier, Grove R. Crafts, chain carrier, and Charles F.H. von Blucher, Surveyor in Charge. Seated l. to r.: George A. von Blucher, assistant rodman, Philip N. Fullerton, crew member, and Hilario Martinez, hostler and general helper. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Cover of Richard Henry Savage's 1893 novel entitled *For Life and Love: A Story of the Rio Grande*, in which *Felix and Maria von Blucher*, along with their children, appeared as characters. Dan Kilgore Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



*Mary Ellen Meuly and
Charles F. H. von Blucher,
ca. 1870s. Charles F. H.
von Blucher Family Papers,
Special Collections &
Archives, Mary and Jeff
Bell Library, Texas A&M
University-Corpus Christi.*

*The original house
of Charles F. H. and
Mary Meuly von
Blucher as it looked
when constructed
in 1880. Charles
F. H. von Blucher
Family Papers,
Special Collections
& Archives, Mary
and Jeff Bell
Library, Texas A&M
University-Corpus
Christi.*

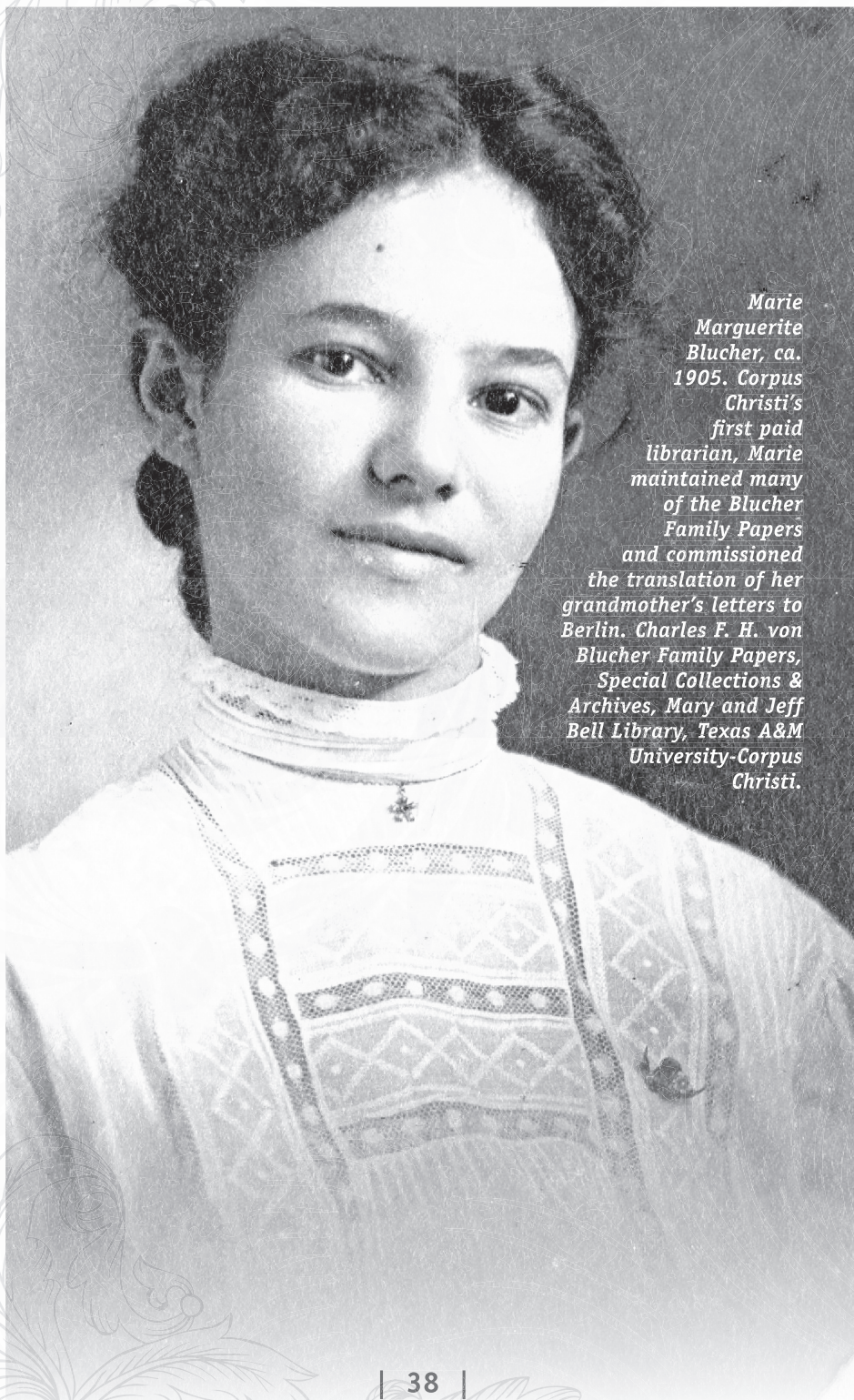




Charles F. H. and Mary Meuly von Blucher seated on the front porch of their home, 1935. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



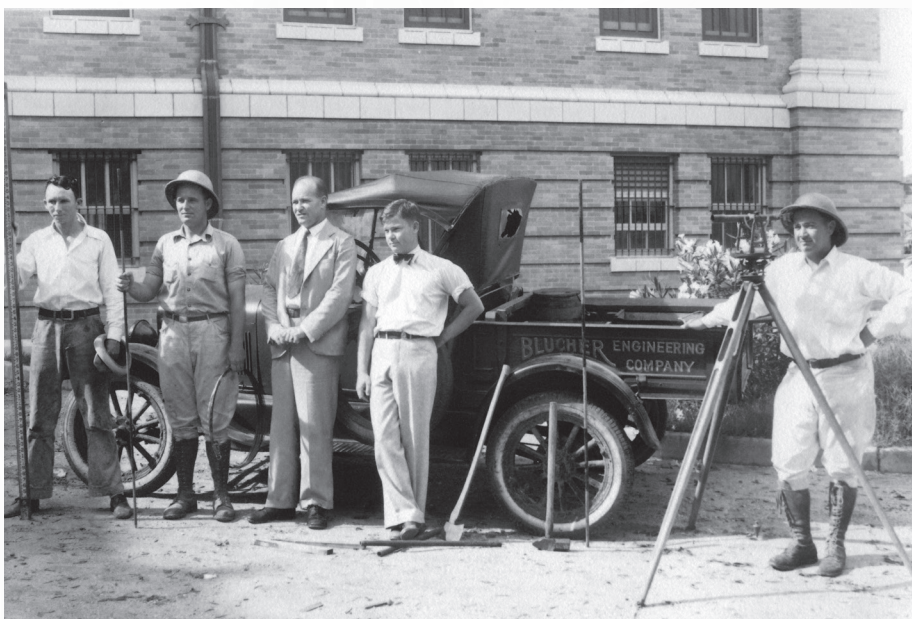
The Charles Blucher Home after the final additions of 1909, where the Blucher Family Papers were assembled. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



*Marie
Marguerite
Blucher, ca.
1905. Corpus
Christi's
first paid
librarian, Marie
maintained many
of the Blucher
Family Papers
and commissioned
the translation of her
grandmother's letters to
Berlin. Charles F. H. von
Blucher Family Papers,
Special Collections &
Archives, Mary and Jeff
Bell Library, Texas A&M
University-Corpus
Christi.*



First Lieutenant Conrad M. Blucher, ca. 1918. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Blucher Engineering Company surveying crew in front of the 1914 Nueces County Courthouse, 1931. Conrad M. Blucher is standing in the middle. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Accessioning & Managing the Blucher Research Materials

Following the death of Conrad Blucher, the Special Collections & Archives Department of Corpus Christi State University would begin to receive and manage what would come to be named the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers (Blucher Family Papers), including its distinct series called the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection (CBSC). Physical acquisition of these Blucher materials comprised a lengthy, complex, often arduous, but methodical process. This accessioning also conformed to the principles of standard archival practice. The materials came in stages, as is most often the case with large family collections, and involved the work of and cooperation among many individuals both on and off campus. It was a representative endeavor, one that other such collecting repositories can draw lessons from in dealing with similar situations.

Zula Hill Blucher began to convey the first of the Blucher historical materials to Corpus Christi State University as per direction in Conrad's 1977 Will. As early as 1980, Zula had gone to the Nueces County Surveyor's office at the courthouse to retrieve select maps, including a magnificent unique 1871 map of Rancho Santa Gertrudis, a copy of which Felix Blucher had created for Captain Richard King himself, doubtless the first such surveyed map of what would come to be known as the famous King Ranch. CCSU president B. Alan Sugg (having succeeded Halladay in that position) and Library Director Richard L. O'Keeffe met with Mrs. Blucher in her Ocean Drive home on several occasions before her death in March 1985. There they received these maps and other materials.⁴⁶

This initial group of items consisted of some of the oldest, more fragile, and historically significant surveying records and business documents. They included the first twenty-five (25) small field books made by Felix Blucher that contained surveying calculations. These twenty-five, which Conrad had retained in his residence, were the beginnings of what amounted to over four hundred (400) such field notebooks compiled by Felix, Charles, and Conrad. Also included were documents such as early abstracts, land grants, and deeds; rolled legal papers and oversized photographs; printed items like building codes from Corpus Christi; a valuable 1936 Texas Almanac; some official Texas state publications; and six large maps from the mid nineteenth century, most hand drawn by Felix Blucher himself, one of which was that of the Rancho Santa Gertrudis. Altogether, the

incipient collection consisted of approximately twelve (12) document cases of various dimensions. ⁴⁷

Accompanying these initial surveying materials were significant three-dimensional objects as well, including Felix Blucher's "transit, two tripods and a wooden wheel used for measuring distances." The "wooden wheel," technically known as a waywiser, was a hand pushed device that ingeniously calculated distances in *varas* (thirty-three and one third inches), the official unit of measurement of land boundaries in Texas. These artifacts were the actual instruments that Felix Blucher had used to map thousands of square miles of Texas terrain. ⁴⁸

At the University, these items were placed in the capable hands of Paul Medley, head of the new Special Collections & Archives Department. Medley had been Special Collections & Archives manager since its beginning in the recently constructed library building in 1978. Located on the library's second floor, the department and its materials were safe from hurricanes and rising waters of the storm and flood prone Gulf Coast area.

In his electronic accession record, Medley noted 1982 as the initial date of acquisition. He would meticulously appraise the Blucher items' historical value and determine their condition for the library director, who would in turn report some of Medley's findings to the university president. Medley recommended that five of the Felix Blucher maps be taken to the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas for immediate "conservation, repair, and encapsulation." He likewise created phase boxes for

the fragile field books and photocopied all twenty-five for safe use by researchers. Careful to detail and preservation, Medley thus spared no effort to make the Blucher materials accessible from the start of their deposition in their new repository.⁴⁹

As the dedication ceremony of the Conrad Blucher Institute for Science and Surveying came and went in 1987, Paul Medley would also deeply engage in the acquisition of other collections for his growing department. Perhaps the most visible of these accessions were such monumental holdings as the Dan Kilgore Collection of Texana books and documents (acquired in 1983-1984) and the Dr. Héctor P. García Papers which first began to come to the University in 1985-1986. Nor were these the only collections that found their way to be under Medley's charge and processing within a growing automated database called askSam. Indeed, Medley was a busy, productive archivist. He possessed strong talents in preservation techniques as well as in developing materials exhibits. His creativity helped pioneer askSam to access electronically these archival resources.⁵⁰

Tragically, Paul Medley died of cancer in October 1989, after more than a decade of able service in building the department. He had played an important role in establishing the Blucher family archival materials at the University's Special Collections.⁵¹

In late 1990, Medley's successor, Thomas H. Kreneck (the author of this study), became head of Special Collections, and the Blucher holdings and other collections came under his charge. Library Director O'Keeffe had hired Kreneck,

for among other things, to develop the materials already housed in the department and to expand the research resources on Corpus Christi history through the acquisition of other documentation as Kreneck had done for Houston during his previous fourteen-year tenure at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. As such, Kreneck's first brush with acquiring new items for CCSU, quite by coincidence, was the opportunity to add to the Blucher Family Papers and its surveying component.⁵²

Beginning work on December 1, 1990, Kreneck received an invitation from Corpus Christi State University History Professor Robert Wooster to meet during the first part of that month with a representative of the Blucher family at the stately Charles von Blucher home to review a quantity of Blucher historical papers. By October of that year, the Blucher heirs who owned the Charles Blucher home had struck an agreement with the Junior League of Corpus Christi for the conveyance of this structure so that it could become a house museum and the Junior League's headquarters. The timing of the impending conveyance highly suggests that the December meeting was prompted by the upcoming transfer of ownership of the home where the Blucher documents were held.⁵³

The four Blucher family members who by 1989-1990 owned the Charles Blucher home, and thus the papers stored within it, consisted of Claudia Blucher Harrel of Kingsville and Mary Julia Blucher Jordan of Houston, both daughters of Carl F. K. von Blucher, and then George A. Blucher, Jr. and Gloria Blucher Alexander, both of Corpus Christi and

the son and daughter of George A. Blucher, Sr. Conrad was their uncle and Charles was their grandfather. Conrad and his two other siblings (Marie and Richard) had died without children. The four descendants now represented the fourth generation of Blucher family with Corpus Christi connections. As he would get to know them, Kreneck would quickly identify these heirs as cordial, generous individuals, as well as proud of the Blucher name and achievements. Also, as was the Blucher family tradition, when dealing with Kreneck, these heirs acted through agreement among themselves.⁵⁴

Claudia Blucher Harrel had likely contacted CCSU through Dr. Joe B. Frantz, the amiable, distinguished historian who had been a noted faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin. Frantz had taken up residence at CCSU in 1984. He was known by Claudia from their mutual connections with the University of Texas (Claudia was an alumnus and convivial person) and more recent casual get togethers for lunch at the Harrel Drugstore in Kingsville after Frantz had relocated to Corpus Christi.⁵⁵

On December 11, 1990, Frantz, Wooster, and Kreneck met with Mrs. George A. (Medora) Blucher, Jr., the spouse of one of the Blucher heirs. She was also de facto manager of the Blucher Family Papers that were by then largely held in the Charles Blucher home. Kreneck would later learn from Medora that the papers at the Blucher house had come there in essentially two groups. The first substantial portion had arrived through the efforts of Felix and Maria's second daughter Julia, who had lived in her

own house in Blucherville since returning from Prussia in 1880. An accumulator, Julia had retained a vast amount of correspondence, photographs, news clippings, and other documents until she died in 1937. Sometime thereafter, her nieces cleaned out Julia's house and placed the paper materials in five or six large bags which they stored in the Charles Blucher home. The second major segment of the papers had been amassed by Charles' wife, Mary Ellen Meuly Blucher, and then kept under the care of her daughter Marie Marguerite Blucher, who lived in the Charles Blucher home. (Marie had of course been a librarian, well aware of the Blucher tradition, and logically understood the value of historic papers). Marie had especially taken possession of Maria von Blucher's nineteenth century letters — written from Corpus Christi to her parents in Germany — after these missives were found among Julia's materials. Marie had retained those particular items in her personal bedroom wardrobe. ⁵⁶

Known as Dodie by her friends and family, Medora had emptied the large bags of materials that came from Julia's house, sorted all the documents, read many of them, and placed them in basic chronological order there in the Charles Blucher house. She arranged, foldered, and boxed the collection with considerable ability. Through this process, Medora came to know the family history. ⁵⁷

At the Blucher home during their December 11 meeting, Medora showed Frantz, Wooster, and Kreneck a range of historical records and expressed an interest by the family to donate them to the University. These materials comprised a

rich and wide assortment of papers dating from the 1800s into the 1930s, covered at least three generations of Blucher endeavors, and contained letters from numerous nineteenth century notable Texans. The assemblage represented a rich resource for the history of Corpus Christi, Nueces County, and South Texas. Much to Kreneck's delight, Wooster asked Mrs. Blucher what would it take for the University to receive those remarkable and extensive materials.⁵⁸

Back on campus, Frantz, Wooster, and Kreneck visited that afternoon with the Interim Vice President for Development Tom Goad, who was the University's interface with the CCSU Foundation, successor to the A&I University Foundation and the independent entity with a board of directors whose purpose was to support CCSU. The Foundation was overseeing the Conrad Blucher bequest and technically owned the family materials already in Special Collections & Archives. There in Goad's office the three historians sought Goad's assistance in the acquisition, stressing that the materials would amount to an amazing addition based just on their assessment. A longtime Corpus Christi resident who understood the importance of the Blucher family's history and contributions, Goad would administratively facilitate the formal next phase in the acquisition of these valuable items. Representing the four Blucher descendants, George A. Blucher, Jr. signed a December 21, 1990 letter of intent to donate the historic Blucher papers that Frantz, Wooster, and Kreneck had previewed.⁵⁹

On April 12, 1991, Kreneck retrieved approximately seven (7) cubic feet of materials from George and Medora

Blucher's home on Wilshire Street in Corpus Christi, where Medora was assembling the papers for safe keeping. Another installment came that year in mid-September. Kreneck brought in another cache from the Blucher home on Wilshire in early November. On December 18, 1992, George and Medora ferried thirteen and one half (13 ½) record storage boxes of papers to the University library. The Blucher materials contained a broad range of items that included personal correspondence, business records, publications, notes, drawings, photographs, and other documents. Importantly, the holdings that came in by 1992 included the entire body of letters written by Maria von Blucher to her parents in Germany, dating from the late 1840s until the 1870s. To allow reproduction, Kreneck also obtained Blucher photos from the Junior League, still then operating the Blucher home as a museum. Kreneck and staff immediately began to re-folder, re-box, and identify the contents to the box level. Altogether, these items comprised approximately twenty-six (26) cubic feet of materials, including two over-sized document cases.⁶⁰

Simultaneous with this significant transfer from the Blucher home on Wilshire Street, Kreneck became intensely involved with the large amount of surveying records at the courthouse. Doubtless aware of Conrad's mention of those materials in his Will, George Blucher urged Kreneck at their April 12, 1991 meeting to contact Bill Green, the official Nueces County Surveyor, about the University's interest in taking custody of those massive Blucher records at the

Surveyor's office. George Blucher provided an introduction for Kreneck with Green, thus commencing a connection that proved most productive. Library Director O'Keeffe also suggested that Kreneck take care of this project as these surveying materials were part of the Blucher acquisition.⁶¹

On April 18, 1991, less than a week after he picked up the first part of the Blucher personal papers, Kreneck went to the County Surveyor's office, where for the first time he met William W. (Bill) Green and his spouse Patricia Green.⁶²

An unpretentious, soft spoken individual, Bill Green had served as Nueces County Surveyor since first elected in 1954. More important, he had worked as Conrad Blucher's assistant for the previous ten years and had stood for election when Blucher retired. In many ways, Bill Green was Conrad Blucher's protégé, and Green held great respect for Blucher as his mentor. He thus made it clear to Kreneck that he wished to ensure Conrad Blucher's legacy. Green valued the collection thoroughly as it had been under his care at the County Surveyor's Office since Conrad's retirement. Just as significant, Patricia efficiently assisted her husband and had already created an impressive four-volume index to the maps, plats, field books, job files and other documents so that access to the collection was as effective as any such body of records could be, at least in Kreneck's mind upon first reviewing it. It did not take Kreneck long to determine that the Greens were totally committed to preserving the Blucher materials.⁶³

During their first lengthy April meeting and in a subsequent visit at the County Surveyor's Office, Kreneck

and the Greens examined the Blucher surveying records that they dubbed the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection (CBSC). Though the Greens did not own these materials, their special relationship with the collection gave them a complete knowledge of its contents. The Greens' longtime association with the Bluchers and the University (Bill served on the Blucher Institute Advisory Committee) made their input indispensable for the disposition of these resources.⁶⁴

Bill Green carefully educated Kreneck on the surveying materials over which the curator (Kreneck) now had direction. Seasoned professional archivists understand that they will come into contact with types of materials about which they know little. Such was the case for Kreneck via-a-vis the technical contents of surveying records and their merit. But Green served as a mentor for Kreneck in instructing him on how to manage and appreciate a surveying collection. As they leafed through the maps and other items Green persuasively noted: "These materials document the history of private land ownership in South Texas."⁶⁵

Clearly, the CBSC was of value for at least two important reasons. First, it contained many maps of individual historical and artifactual merit, certainly akin to the dozen or so iconic original ones from the CBSC which had been housed at Special Collections & Archives by Zula Blucher during the 1980s. Second, the CBSC was obviously a practicing surveyor's resource of great importance to lands in and around Nueces County and should continue to be made readily available to these practitioners as it was under

the care of Bill Green. As of 1991, however, CCSU Special Collections simply did not have the space or resources to house and make these many thousands of items similarly accessible.⁶⁶

During their initial meetings, Kreneck and Green determined that they should review every map and plat in the CBSC and decide which items should be placed in Special Collections. After determining as much, Kreneck and Green envisioned creating reproductions that would remain for their informational value in the CBSC in the Surveyor's office along with the vast majority of the other CBSC maps of lesser artifactual merit. Only the original maps of those selected would then be moved to Special Collections. Kreneck reported his and Green's recommendation and ongoing work to the July 13, 1991 meeting of the Blucher Institute Advisory Committee.⁶⁷

In August 1991, Kreneck and the Greens began to meet almost on a weekly basis at times to review fully the CBSC. By late November, Kreneck and Bill Green concluded this examination and even transferred several scores of maps that included duplicates, rolled and fragile items, and map portfolios to Special Collections. By this time, Special Collections had included the services of staff member Pam Durrwachter who played an essential role in the process of finding and transporting these materials from the courthouse to the library. Durrwachter had also established the department's official inclusive electronic accession record called "Acqrec" in askSam, and into which she entered the accession notations of the Blucher materials.

Kreneck and Green identified at least two hundred (200) other maps in the CBSC that should be archived. Kreneck prepared a master list of these items for future attention. These objects included original hand drawn Blucher maps as well as blueprints, tracings, and such printed items as subdivision, city, and county maps. These two hundred graphics still remained to be duplicated, and Kreneck had to find financial resources to copy them incrementally at the first possible opportunity. In short, after November 1991, though much had been accomplished with the CBSC, a great deal of effort was yet needed.⁶⁸

Of equal significance, Kreneck's survey of the CBSC under Green's tutelage also introduced him to Bill Green's own personal surveying collection which Green and his spouse had compiled over their many years of service. Importantly, the massive Green collection contained original Felix Blucher materials donated to Bill during his tenure as County Surveyor. Kreneck and Green discussed the future disposition of his important holdings, a decision eventually to be influenced by how Special Collections and the Conrad Blucher Institute would handle the CBSC. In July 1991, Kreneck had reported the advisability of CCSU eventually accessioning the Green Surveying Collection to the library director and to concerned people at the CBI.⁶⁹

This systematic, simultaneous work with the Blucher Family Papers and the CBSC was accompanied by a necessary, legal conveyance of title to both archival components. Technically the materials belonged to the CCSU Foundation. Under lengthy, meticulous scrutiny by its legal counsel

Harvey Branscomb, the Foundation transferred to the University its ownership of the documents via a donation agreement drafted by Kreneck and subsequently signed on May 12, 1992 by the Foundation president, John W. Crutchfield, and by then CCSU President Robert R. Furgason.⁷⁰

Kreneck, Durrwachter, and other staff of Special Collections placed the items of the Blucher Family Papers in acid free folders and boxes, while also giving the materials additional preliminary organization, thus building upon what Medora Blucher had neatly accomplished. Staff likewise housed the accessioned surveying maps in acid free storage containers. Durrwachter had capably established a complete physical donor file on the Blucher Family Papers, consolidating the documentation created by Paul Medley and that which had been compiled subsequent to his departure in 1989. Special Collections personnel hosted tours of the department for several stakeholders, including Rhonda Bosquez and other representatives of the Junior League as well as John Crutchfield. These individuals were interested in the University's activities in preserving the Blucher legacy.⁷¹

By 1994, a combination of factors made it seem prudent to all concerned that a new comprehensive, final donor agreement be negotiated. Several considerations led to this decision. First, ownership of the Blucher materials transferred from the 1980s forward was now firmly with the University rather than the CCSU Foundation. Second, much of what was conveyed beginning in 1991 came through

the four members of a new generation of the family — namely, Claudia Blucher Harrel, Mary Julia Blucher Jordan, George A. Blucher, Jr., and Gloria Blucher Alexander. Third, the volume and the variety of those items had expanded. Lastly, but importantly, these new Blucher donors keenly desired that a book be written based on the nineteenth century letters of Maria von Blucher, and they wanted to determine specific control over the use of that particular correspondence.

Accordingly, on March 23, 1994, Kreneck and Durrwachter met over lunch in Corpus Christi with George Blucher, his spouse Medora, and Claudia Harrel to begin discussions on that updated, comprehensive donor agreement. Kreneck shared with them the progress made on the map selection, acquisition and projected reproduction of CBSC items at the County Surveyor's Office, and on other topics. The Blucher spokespeople present expressed their concern with the well-being of both the surveying records and the family papers. All participants knew that the trusted Bill Green was set to retire with the 1994 upcoming election. With interest, the Bluchers focused on the family giving guidance to any future use of the Maria von Blucher letters. Claudia Harrel in particular emphasized the group's intent to produce the book based on these missives and even a possible movie on Maria's life. This meeting provided a positive beginning for negotiating the agreement that culminated, after multiple drafts, in its signing in 1996.⁷²

Later in 1994, financial resources fortunately became available to reproduce the maps identified on the master

list created by Kreneck and Green in 1991. These funds were generously provided in September by Nickolas Kraus, by then Director of the Conrad Blucher Institute. Kreneck and Kraus, with the support of by then Library Director Ben T. Wakashige, had formulated a joint plan between Special Collections & Archives and the CBI to address the needs of the CBSC. As the CBI's part in this effort, Kraus committed \$10,000 to cover the costs of labor, duplication, preservation and the purchasing of two oversize metal map storage cases.

Such monetary support underscored not only the need for resources, but the fact that such funding was more readily available from campus agencies dealing with STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) than with liberal arts. This reality was especially the case for a library like (by then) Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, where a great deal of the budget was being invested during the 1990s into automating the library's book and periodical holdings.

The process of retrieving the maps on the inventory occurred during a series of meetings by Kreneck and Green between October 13 and November 3, 1994. This challenge had the able assistance of Special Collections paraprofessional staff member Norman Zimmerman and Blucher Institute employee Karin Boedecker. Zimmerman would eventually encapsulate and inventory these treasures. Secure within two new metal storage cases purchased with CBI funds, a total of approximately two hundred fifteen (215) valuable Blucher items thus arrived at Special Collections. This placement increased

their level of preservation and accessibility to researchers, since exact duplicates also stayed in the main CBSC.⁷³

By 1994, Gary A. Jeffress had long since entered the picture as a strong presence for preserving the Blucher records. Originally from Australia with a Bachelor's degree in Surveying and with a Ph.D. in Surveying Engineering from the University of Maine, Dr. Jeffress had arrived at the Blucher Institute as professor of surveying in October 1990, and after a year became the Director of Surveying. He had the specific mission to design and propose a four-year Bachelor's degree in surveying which he accomplished by 1994.

Jeffress was totally familiar with the CBSC, having visited the County Surveyor's office in the company of Richard Phelps, CBI Director of Operations, when he (Jeffress) had first arrived in Corpus Christi. Having been introduced to one another early on by Phelps, Jeffress and Kreneck frequently conversed on the importance of those records while Jeffress was constructing his degree program. With his in-depth understanding of and interest in surveying materials, Jeffress emerged as an indispensable force in preserving not only the CBSC but other surveying papers that the University would later acquire. On October 4, 1994, Kreneck and Jeffress visited Green's office at the courthouse together to assess matters, as concern over the future of that collection was by then reaching a critical point.⁷⁴

The uneasiness that the Blucher family members, Bill and Patricia Green, Jeffress, Kreneck and others felt for the safety of the CBSC came to a head on election day in November

1994. With Bill Green retiring, a capable individual named Jaime Pyle stepped forward as candidate for the position. Green endorsed her, and Pyle won the seat. Unfortunately, reflecting an anti-government sentiment of the times plus a statewide effort to abolish the office of County Surveyor (even though the position was unpaid), a referendum had been placed on the ballot in Nueces County to do away with the job. The move to abolish was approved by the county's electorate, though by a fewer number of votes than Pyle received. Thus, almost absurdly, the office no longer existed for Pyle to take.⁷⁵

At that point, it became a necessity for the University to move the CBSC from the County Courthouse as courthouse administrators were always seeking additional space to expand other offices. Such immediacy, often encountered by collecting archivists, would be met and overcome by those persons involved in maintaining the Blucher surveying records.

Using funds left over from the \$10,000 allocated by Nick Kraus, Kreneck oversaw the move of the CBSC on November 16, 1994. Accomplished by the local firm of Tony's Transfer, the move cost approximately four hundred sixty (\$460) dollars. The massive collection within its oversize cases was transported to the University to a portable, metal building that stood alongside the Conrad Blucher Institute, since space at that moment was not available in the library. However, the CBSC was now a step closer to its rightful home where Kreneck and Zimmerman could oversee its physical protection, as

the Blucher family wanted. Bill and Patricia Green, who assisted Special Collections every step of the way, took great relief from the actions of Special Collections and the support of Jeffress and Kraus.⁷⁶

In many ways, the process of getting the CBSC — as the first major segment of the Blucher papers to reach A&M-Corpus Christi campus in its entirety — culminated on December 16, 1994, with a reception for Bill and Patricia Green held at the Blucher Institute. There, among many other expressions of gratitude bestowed upon them, Special Collections & Archives personnel presented the Greens with a plaque commemorating their service to the preservation of historic documents and acknowledging their work with the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection.⁷⁷

Still, the numerous actions on behalf of the CBSC continued throughout 1994 and into 1995. Expending other remaining money from Kraus' \$10,000 allocation, in late December, Kreneck ferried three important Felix von Blucher maps to Austin for needed preservation work by Carrabba Conservation. Cheryl Carrabba, one of the best conservators in the business, took charge of the task of stabilizing these treasures that dated from the 1850s. Carrabba also produced museum quality photographic copies of the 1871 Felix Blucher map of the Santa Gertrudis Estate (King Ranch) which Kreneck wished to gift to the four principal Blucher heirs.⁷⁸

As the major players dealt with the CBSC at the courthouse, Special Collections & Archives took steps in liberating the voices within the Blucher Family Papers. Regularly instructing research classes at CCSU, Kreneck immediately utilized the Blucher family manuscripts in helping aspiring students understand and interpret nineteenth century handwritten documents as primary sources.⁷⁹

Professional researchers as well came to use the Blucher materials, since the records were open to inquiry. Among the first of these eager off-campus scholars was historian and Civil War expert Professor Norman Delaney of Corpus Christi's Del Mar College. Already a patron of Special Collections, by early 1993 Professor Delaney had found interest in a major Blucher document; in particular, a drawing of the Battle of Corpus Christi of 1862 by David Gambel, an item that had been transferred by the Blucher heirs with the other materials. Though the Blucher Family Papers were in their earliest stages of archival arrangement, Delaney's pursuit demonstrated that true scholars readily search out materials regardless of their level of archival control, especially when using the most valuable research tool that exists, i.e. the personal connection patrons have with the reference archivist, or at least with those archivists who actively extend themselves to have their resources used. Delaney's meticulous research would culminate in the publication of an article entitled "Searching for Sergeant Gambel: David Reed Gambel, Soldier and Painter, 1825-1874," in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, January 2005.⁸⁰

Of even greater significance, a major research project commenced on October 14, 1994, when archivist and historian of King Ranch, Bruce S. Cheeseman of Kingsville began his active involvement with the letters of Maria von Blucher by making a trip to Special Collections to review those documents. Claudia Blucher Harrel had read Cheeseman's edited volume entitled *My Dear Henrietta: Hiram Chamberlain's Letters to His Daughter, 1846-1866* (1993), a book of nineteenth century correspondence from the father of Richard King's wife. A fellow Kingsville resident, Harrel had approached Cheeseman about a similar work she and her sister Mary Julia had long envisioned using Maria von Blucher's letters to her parents in Germany. (These negotiations had contributed to the previously mentioned push for the new comprehensive donor agreement.) Cheeseman made his October 1994 visit to Special Collections to preview the materials with which he might be dealing and would for the next several years become a regular researcher in the collection.⁸¹

The book agreement between the Bluchers and Cheeseman was consummated on December 1, 1994 in the reference room of Special Collections & Archives in a formal meeting among Cheeseman, Claudia Harrel, Mary Julia Jordan, and Kreneck. By being held as a regular departmental activity, this gathering solidified the role of Special Collections as coordinator of the endeavor. There the parties discussed the project, which would eventually result in an award-winning volume.⁸²

The Blucher materials sealed the department's association with all the individuals engaged in the process of massive acquisition. The Greens and Claudia Harrel visited campus on several occasions, maintaining a constant contact with Special Collections & Archives. These relationships were even further strengthened with a May 17, 1995 reception held at the Blucher Institute when Kreneck and Jeffress presented the Blucher donors and others with copies of the 1871 Santa Gertrudis Estate (King Ranch) map that had been duplicated through Carrabba Conservation. Covered by the campus newspaper, the event was a splendid success, hosting about a dozen Blucher family members, the Greens and other close associates. Kreneck sought to summarize the University's feelings about the CBSC and the entire Blucher Family Papers when he noted: "This is the most important [document] I've ever had under my care in my 20 years as a historian and archivist." For the Bluchers, Claudia Harrel replied: "We've heard stories of Felix's maps all of our lives ... This is a thrill to have such a marvelous reproduction of one of his maps." In this manner, Special Collections and the Blucher Institute extended a form of public outreach beneficial to a university. This gesture of building trust and relationships with supportive donors represents one of the more fulfilling, meaningful parts of a curator's job.⁸³

Other activities took place on behalf of the Blucher surveying records. Because of the care needed for the more delicate parts of the CBSC, staff had moved the field books directly to Special Collections. Bill and Patricia Green came

to the department to help properly arrange and shelve those items. Kreneck and Jeffress met during the summer of 1995 to brainstorm in an in-depth manner on the future care and accessibility of the CBSC. With word spreading that the CBSC was at the University, use of it heightened when the General Land Office (GLO) in Austin requested a map for a court case undertaken by the Texas Attorney General's office, a map that even the GLO did not possess. The CSBC was a prize possession and much attention focused on it.⁸⁴

Around this time, Nick Kraus of the Blucher Institute telephoned Kreneck to say that his program needed, for other of its purposes, the building which housed the Blucher Surveying maps and plats. Again, additional space is always a legitimate need by all agencies. Although this call caused inconvenience for the library, Kraus remained insistent and Library Director Wakashige conceded to the request. As is universally the case, power relationships exist, especially on university campuses, and the head of the Blucher Institute had greater clout than the average head librarian.⁸⁵

The move of the CBSC took place in late September 1995 under staff member Norman Zimmerman's watchful eye. The CBSC materials were carefully conveyed across campus and into a storage area within the technical services unit on the library's first floor. Never afraid of hard work, Zimmerman did his share of the heavy lifting. The tech services personnel had to make room to accommodate the massive Blucher collection.

In many ways, this imposed move was a plus, as Kreneck

and Zimmerman had always feared that the temporary metal building could not withstand a gulf hurricane, an annual threat in Corpus Christi. This relocation also brought the CBSC one giant step closer to direct supervision by Special Collections & Archives staff. With this move, care, access, and use of the CBSC had shifted fully to Special Collections, its rightful manager.⁸⁶

With the handling of so many Blucher materials behind and the clearing of the various stakeholders' calendars finished, it was time to bring to fruition the comprehensive Blucher donor agreement first discussed with the family descendants in 1994 and begun in draft form that year. Most important, by then Bruce Cheeseman's focus on the volume dealing with Maria von Blucher had accelerated and the issue of the general use of those items by future researchers needed to be clarified in writing.⁸⁷

The process of completing that donor agreement moved methodically, considering the many parts needing precise detail and the different individuals involved. Having written an initial draft of the agreement and ready for review, Kreneck met with the Texas A&M University System's general counsel attorney Melissa Ricard, who was assigned to the Corpus Christi campus. This meeting took place in early January 1996 to discuss the Blucher issues.⁸⁸

When System attorneys become involved, strict archival practice by the curators themselves must rightfully be adjusted to what the university lawyers require. That the document would be signed by the university president brought university counsel into play. To ensure the

agreement's comprehensive nature, Ricard directed Kreneck to write a concise accession history of the Blucher materials to be attached to the final donor agreement. The attorney emphasized brevity. Kreneck researched and composed that accession description and sent it to Ricard by April 1 of that same year.⁸⁹

The donor agreement itself, written by Kreneck, went through at least eight (8) drafts with the various interested parties reading and making suggestions during the process. The document encompassed both the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers (the name insisted upon by the Blucher descendants) and the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, the latter as a distinct series within the larger holding. Kreneck visited personally with all the principals, including driving to Kingsville to see Claudia Harrel. In Corpus Christi, he sought input from George Blucher, Jr. and Willie J. Kosarek, the latter being the executor of the estate of Conrad and Zula Blucher. The agreement finally ascended the University's administrative chain and reached Provost Tito Guerrero and President Robert Furgason. The process took approximately one year, with the document's signing officially dated as December 2, 1996. The agreement, in essence a contract, contained the signatures of the four Blucher descendants, Kosarek, and Furgason.⁹⁰

While the three-page donor agreement contained standard clauses for such an instrument, it stipulated that the four Blucher descendants retain control over access to the Maria von Blucher letters for their lifetimes, after which complete control reverted to the University. Importantly

as well, Kreneck purposely included section twelve (12), a standard donor agreement clause that specified that any future additional materials from the Bluchers would be added to the existing collection and passed to the University under the provisions of the 1996 document. Seasoned collecting archivists know that with most such community donations, other valuable items, still in family hands, will likely be forthcoming. Such collections seldom totally come in at one time. The CBSC was with the University in its entirety, but many other Blucher Family Papers of a personal and business nature were yet to be accessioned.⁹¹

Both segments of the Blucher materials remained in use by researchers to varying degrees during the 1990s. Archival control of the Blucher Family Papers was at the box level and could be readily paged. The CBSC series, having its own detailed finding guides (i.e. the index volumes), could be accessed with even more precision.

Utilization of the Blucher Family Papers by scholars, public officials, and individuals would be too lengthy to mention herein. Of note, however, was the use of information and images by Kathy Whatley of the Texas Society of Professional Surveyors and by W. J. (Bill) Sames and Gary Jeffress for a sequence of three articles that appeared in early 1996 in *The Texas Surveyor* on the new four-year degree plan in Geographic Information Science at A&M-Corpus Christi and on the Blucher family history. The first essay comprised an interview with Jeffress by Whatley on the GIS program's

development, while the latter two were the previously referenced overview entitled “The Von Bluchers,” expertly written by Sames and Jeffress. Departmental staff hosted visits by both of the latter authors during the completion of their diligent research.⁹²

Importantly, the articles by Sames and Jeffress explained the transfer of the Blucher materials to Special Collections, noted their presence in this new repository, and even included a partial list of the collection’s contents. Notably as well, Whatley (managing editor of *The Texas Surveyor*) illustrated the Sames-Jeffress articles with images from the Blucher personal papers and informed the readership that “the maps, documents and photographs pertaining to the Bluchers and their surveying legacy are available for viewing at the archives of the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library.” No one reading the three essays could miss the value of those records nor the inextricable connection among the University’s GIS program, the Blucher Institute and the Blucher historical records held by the Special Collections department. Clearly, too, there was little distinction to be made between the Charles F. H. von Blucher Papers and its series the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection.⁹³

Though the size and completeness of the CBSC exceeded that of the Blucher personal papers, Bruce Cheeseman’s book project on the letters of Maria von Blucher launched by the family descendants progressed in a serious manner and loomed large. Leaving direct employment with King Ranch in 1996 to become an independent consultant, Cheeseman

could devote full time to completing his manuscript.⁹⁴

Cheeseman had taken on a formidable assignment — the type of scholarly commitment that would take multiple years for even an accomplished writer like Cheeseman to bring to fruition. Maria had written to her parents from the time she and Felix had departed for Texas in 1849 and had continued until her mother's death in 1879. Maria's daughter Julia who had gone to live with the Immes in 1869, had returned to Corpus Christi after her grandmother died. Julia had fortunately brought her mother's letters with her and retained them in her home in Blucherville for the remainder of her life.

These missives to Prussia, all part of the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers already at Special Collections & Archives, included 229 letters. During the immediate post WWII period of the 1950s, Marie Blucher, the librarian daughter of Charles, had sent this correspondence back to Germany to be translated from their old German into English. The resulting translations totaled 919 manuscript pages, including notations.⁹⁵

Special Collections had facilitated Cheeseman's efforts early on by making him copies of this massive amount of English-language correspondence. Cheeseman had likewise delved into the larger Blucher personal collection through the assistance of expert reference staff including Alva Neer, Grace Charles, and Jan Weaver; these energetic individuals located family reminiscences and other documents of importance to the editor, especially in 1997-1998. Along the way, Cheeseman received continuing encouragement

from the Blucher family descendants, particularly from Claudia Harrel. Cheeseman did a masterful job of selecting, paring down, and annotating these historic findings. He had incorporated approximately 119 letters. His superior skills as a writer ensured the final product's quality. ⁹⁶

In 1999, the manuscript was submitted to Texas A&M University Press where it was accepted for publication. For professional and personal reasons, Cheeseman left active participation in the project. However, to complete the publication, Kreneck, with financial underwriting by and ongoing input from the Blucher family, brought in the editorial prowess of Arnolde De León of Angelo State University, one of the leading Texas history authors and editors of his time. De León worked directly with the Press throughout the copyediting process; A&M Press' Managing Editor Mary Lynn Dixon proved especially crucial in facilitating the endeavor. Altogether, the work comprised a collective effort that brought Maria von Blucher's *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi: Letters from the South Texas Frontier, 1849-1879*, Edited and Annotated by Bruce S. Cheeseman, to publication in 2002. ⁹⁷

The volume was well received, especially for its liberation of the woman's voice on the nineteenth century Texas and United States frontier, not to mention for its depiction, among other things, of the Americanization and contributions of a German immigrant family. Its review in the *Dallas Morning News*, for instance, stated that the edited letters had "the feel of an epistolary novel" and were "the stuff of drama." Fittingly, the review concluded: "It

isn't too often that non-fiction stories are made into films, but this one ought to be." For the benefit of advertising the Blucher personal collection, the *Morning News* reviewer noted that the letters represented "only a small part of a larger holding of family papers housed in special collections at the Corpus Christi campus of Texas A&M University." ⁹⁸

Receptions were held for the book at various locations around the Corpus Christi area, including at the Richard Blucher House in Blucherville during the annual Texas State Historical Association conference in Corpus Christi that year. The King Ranch's Henrietta Memorial Center in Kingsville hosted a grand event for the book and its editor as well. Notably, too, Herb Canales, director of the Corpus Christi Public Libraries and one of the volume's staunchest proponents, held an impressive affair at the Central Library. As perhaps its crowning achievement, *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi* was given the Texas State Historical Association's prestigious Liz Carpenter Award for the best scholarly book on the history of women and Texas published during the 2002 calendar year. ⁹⁹

Illustrating the value of such a joint publication effort and the long-term building of trust between the archival repository and donors, during the production phase of *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi* the family made more systematic contributions of materials to increase the personal and business parts of the Blucher Family Papers as covered in section 12 of the 1996 donor agreement. While the manuscript was in preparation, Mary Julia Jordan provided the collection with copies of a unique

painted portrait of a young Felix Blucher, dated around 1840. Following the submission of the manuscript to A&M University Press and seemingly in response to its waning interest in maintaining the Blucher house museum, the Junior League, at the family's behest, transferred five (5) cubic foot boxes of original Blucher items from the Charles Blucher home to Special Collections in the summer of 1999. Three (3) cubic feet of materials came directly from Claudia Harrel and Medora Blucher that same summer. Twenty-five (25) cubic feet in various installments arrived later that fall of 1999. A small amount of important materials (including a few fugitive letters by Maria) came directly from Medora Blucher in February 2000. Staff spirits were considerably buoyed in this acquisition process by the new library director, Abby Kratz, who was intrigued with the quality of such additions.

Always these donations comprised systematic conveyances from a tight circle of individuals who included George and Medora Blucher, Claudia Harrel, Mary Julia Jordan, and Rhonda Bosquez, with Kreneck receiving those materials for the repository and recording them in the department's official Accession Log. In commonly accepted archival practice, such documentation represents an essential part of the acquisition history for future staff members to consult.¹⁰⁰

Manifesting its close association with the Blucher Institute, Special Collections & Archives even received donations of Blucher materials from the CBI. That agency transferred files of Conrad Blucher papers in its possession

to the department in 1997, adding to the larger Blucher Family Papers.¹⁰¹

These new additions kept expanding the size of the Blucher Family Papers, and the staff continued to label their contents to the box level. When the Bell Library posted its first home page on the Internet during the 1990s, the site for Special Collections featured the Blucher Family Papers among its holdings. During the 2000-01 academic year, the department upgraded this mention by adding a separate link describing the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, thus providing another electronic venue for making the existence of this important holding known to its various constituencies. While simply descriptive, these online notices attracted patrons.¹⁰²

Although archival control of the Blucher Family Papers remained in a state of continual upgrading, experienced archivists understand that if a collecting repository does not have a backlog of collections to process to the folder level, then that agency is not collecting actively enough. The production of history never ceases. As the late, distinguished archivist David Gracy II once stated: "Archives are dynamic." They are constantly in motion. All robust agencies have a processing backlog with materials in varying degrees of archival control. A&M-Corpus Christi's Special Collections & Archives was no exception.

At this juncture in the narrative, it behooves the reader to be reminded of several other fundamental lessons most archivists learn upon being in the profession for a while. Like Cheeseman, Sames, Jeffress, and Delaney, enterprising

scholars needed only basic, often little notification of existing materials in order to seek them out. And as long as these documents were open to use and worthy reference staff were available to assist — especially in the days before Covid and more advanced Internet access proved economically feasible — such researchers would require only the most elemental finding aids. Indeed, Special Collections & Archives at the Bell Library hosted other astute scholars in the 1990s to prove these points. Professor José Limón of the University of Texas, in pursuit of the “lost” manuscripts of Jovita González, was led to Special Collections literally by word of mouth soon after the department accessioned González’s papers in 1992. News of the acquisition drew Limón to the campus where he thoroughly examined her collection which had reached only a rudimentary state of organization. He soon worked with the department to edit and publish two books by Jovita González, both of which altered the canon of Mexican American literature. James Crisp of North Carolina State University researched in various “unprocessed” materials within the Dan Kilgore Collection in his (Crisp’s) lifelong journey to sleuth questions surrounding the Texas War for Independence, the Alamo, and David Crockett in fact and legend. Film maker Jeff Felts of Public Television KEDT in Corpus Christi began intensely working on his award-winning documentary “Justice for My People: The Dr. Hector P. García Story” during the 1990s and early 2000s, using largely unprocessed films and photographs. Professor Ignacio García, accessing items remotely through reference archivists, did much of his research on Mexican

American civil rights in the García Papers. On A&M-Corpus Christi campus, historian Alan Lessoff began a decade and one half long research project in various collections, some fully processed, others not, which would result in his seminal volume *Where Texas Meets the Sea: Corpus Christi and Its History*. Such scholars were like discoverers who could not be dissuaded from unearthing new findings. They showed initiative, often preferred uncharted waters, and their products were all the richer for it. ¹⁰³

Other researchers continued to pursue the Blucher materials. A highlight of a few of these visitors will indicate this interest. Memorable examples included Aaron Mahr and Douglas A. Murphy, historical interpreters from the Palo Alto Battlefield National Park staff. These two scholars came separately to Special Collections where they located — recorded on an 1867 map drawn by Felix Blucher — the road likely used by Zachary Taylor's troops along the Texas coast. Well known consulting historian Martha Doty Freeman of Austin researched in the CBSC and the Blucher Family Papers for one of her contract projects, gleaning what she could from an intensive review of the maps, plats, and related documents. Patrons such as Freeman demonstrated the connection between the surveying records and the family's business materials. The colorful, award-winning historian and illustrator Jack Jackson, in his search for data on Fort Lipantitlán, delved into maps and documents from numerous collections, including the Blucher family files. Based on what he found in WorldCat, the international library online catalog, scholar Joel Fetzer, from far away Pepperdine University in

California, visited the department in June 2007 to mine the Blucher Family Papers for his research on white ethnics in American history.¹⁰⁴

Even Kreneck and Cheeseman sealed their work together by publishing from the CBSC the first map of King Ranch, the item which Kreneck had long described as the most iconic document he had ever curated. During the 1990s, Kreneck and Cheeseman began discussing the publication project. This collaboration resulted in their “Map of the Santa Gertrudis Estate, 1871: A Foundation Document of King Ranch,” in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in 2004. Among the map’s many revelations, Cheeseman’s keen eye detected the location of the ranch’s first barbed wire perimeter, testifying to King’s introduction of fencing to South Texas. Arresting in its appearance, an image of the map graces the issue’s cover.¹⁰⁵

With established researchers working at one end of the spectrum, on the other were students in the advanced research and history capstone classes at A&M-Corpus Christi and other local educational institutions using the Blucher Papers and maps with increased frequency. Since Kreneck hosted such classes each semester, with assistance of trusted staff members like Jan Weaver and Grace Charles, he continued to employ nineteenth century Blucher correspondence to illustrate the perils and possibilities of examining handwritten materials. Students seemed most gratified, seemingly thrilled, to examine letters penned by such notables as Richard King, George West, John S. “Rip” Ford, Mifflin Kenedy and others whose names were

common knowledge in Texas history and lore, and in place names of nearby towns, counties, and other parts of South Texas. Kreneck, along with urban historians Alan Lessoff and David Blanke, brought Blucher maps into play when teaching students how to study the growth of Corpus Christi itself. Such items included Felix Blucher's first known map of Corpus Christi in 1860 as well as Conrad Blucher's printed street maps that he produced from 1938 to 1950 showing Corpus Christi expansion over the course of nearly a century.

Other specific educational applications of Blucher materials proved beneficial to both the GIS program students and the Special Collections. Professor Jeffress directed an independent study class with one of his senior level surveying students on the CBSC. The student, Steve Mizell, visually reviewed the collection during the fall of 1999 and noted: "It's not often that a student can be exposed to the actual materials compiled by accomplished surveyors over such a long period of time dealing with the same geographic area. I think it's great that the Library has this collection." Mizell compiled a comprehensive list of rolled documents not necessarily noted on pre-existing inventories held by the department, thus advancing archival control of the CBSC. Into the 2000s, adjunct professor Jaime Pyle conducted a senior level course on Cadastral Mapping, a class which included sessions hosted by Kreneck acquainting students with CBSC materials. GIS Professor Stacey Lyle's advanced surveying class, under Jan Weaver's guidance, reviewed the entire CBSC. The students under Lyle found the documents relevant to their studies and future careers. These activities

and more underscored the interrelationship between that program and the department's Blucher holdings.¹⁰⁶

Because the Felix Blucher maps possessed artistic visual quality as well as informational value, the department was asked and agreed to display select items at such institutions as the Lyndon B. Johnson Library at the University of Texas at Austin and the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History. Such endeavors necessitated inter-institutional cooperation for A&M-Corpus Christi with kindred agencies.¹⁰⁷

However, the CBSC and associated business papers within the larger Blucher Family Papers had their most continuing use among a distinct group of patrons — that is, professional surveyors. These specialists ranged from independent practitioners to representatives of larger firms. This enthusiastic base of users began in earnest by 1995, once the CBSC was under the roof of the library and within easy reach of the Special Collections staff. Its new location catapulted those materials into one of the department's better resources and means of public outreach.

Patrons could access the maps, plats, and field books by examining the index volumes under the watchful eye of reference personnel such as Zimmerman, Charles, Weaver, and capable student assistants. The procedure of getting hard copies into the hands of the surveyors involved Kreneck taking the desired oversize maps and plats to a local firm in downtown Corpus Christi for copying. The original document was immediately returned to its rightful place in the CBSC, and the patron would pick up and pay for the copy at the business which had made the reproduction.¹⁰⁸

In some cases, representatives of the General Land Office in Austin sought copies of maps from the CBSC. These requests resulted in Kreneck visiting the GLO to learn what that agency possessed and how the two institutions could cooperate in other endeavors. The department established great rapport with the GLO and many of its staff including Joan Kilpatrick, Galen Greaser, and others.

Surveyors and government researchers were not the only ones wishing to use the maps, as architects and local attorneys did so as well. With the CBSC inhouse, A&M-Corpus Christi's Special Collections & Archives joined the community of Texas repositories that held significant surveying resources and shared such information.¹⁰⁹

The University further utilized its Blucher holdings through continuing education efforts. Jeffress and the GISC program and the Special Collections & Archives Department periodically conducted day long seminars on researching historic archives data. These seminars were held in the reference room of Special Collections on Saturdays and operated in partnership with the Coastal Bend Chapter of the Texas Society of Professional Surveyors for continuing education credits. These sessions included a hands-on practicum dealing with jobs and projects within the CSBC, but they also featured the other surveying materials held by the department. The forums included a mix of speakers including Jeffress, Kreneck, practicing surveyors Jaime Pyle and Mike McGinnis, and Patricia Green, the latter having compiled the CBSC index volumes. The presence of Green, well-respected among local surveyors as the assistant and

widow of the revered Bill Green (who had died in 2001) and one of the last persons to have worked with the legendary Conrad Blucher, garnered great admiration from the attendees.¹¹⁰

The Blucher Family Papers and the CBSC had another far-reaching influence for the University; that is, they served as a magnet for other surveying records to be contributed. This attraction commenced in small but significant ways with the donation of individual masterpieces. In May 1991, Jim Stever, a noted local philatelic historian, had given the department a unique hand drawn Felix Blucher document from the 1850s containing part of the route Blucher was opening between Corpus Christi and Eagle Pass on the Rio Grande. This information, Blucher noted in his own handwriting, had come down to him from James Manning, a surveyor of the region in the 1830s. Such documentation provided insight into not only Blucher's work and Texas history, but also how surveyors "walked in the footsteps" of previous professionals in charting boundaries and other endeavors.¹¹¹

Jim Stever soon helped to acquire what remained of the James Manning Surveying Papers. Though consisting of only one document case, these items pushed back the record of professional surveyors to pre-Blucher times, especially in San Patricio County. Particularly gratifying for Special Collections, the acquisition of the Manning Papers became a group effort among the department, Jeffress and the GIS program, then head of the Blucher Institute James Bonner, and such prominent surveying company owners as J. Dale

Moore and Robert L. Young, as well as from approximately a dozen other members of the local surveying community who contributed financially. All of these individuals had benefited from the CBSC. The Manning Papers had been in the possession of a documents vendor, and the Corpus Christi surveyors had rallied to help Special Collections & Archives purchase these items for broader public use.¹¹²

The CBSC and the larger Blucher Family Papers also led to gifts of entire collections amassed by other historic local professional surveyors. For just one major example, through the influence of David and Jaime Pyle and with the assistance of Gary Jeffress, in 2000, the J&B Habluetzel Trust, under its trustee Rita H. Bownds and her mother Barbara Habluetzel, generously contributed the massive surveying records of George W. King and Lynn D. King, a father and son surveying company in the Ingleside-Aransas Pass area. The King Surveying Records included over 3,400 hand drawn maps, plats, and drawings as well as numerous cubic foot boxes of field books, notes, property survey descriptions, reports, correspondence, job receipts, publications, and other surveying-related materials, all which dated approximately from the 1930s-1980s. Interesting, too, the King papers contained items created by J. S. Peters, an earlier regional surveyor; these materials had been incorporated into the King collection.¹¹³

The King Records provided much surveying information on the Ingleside-Aransas Pass locale, as well as on other adjacent areas of South Texas. Like the CBSC, they would have many research constituencies. Kreneck made a basic

preliminary inventory of the King acquisition as he gathered these items through dusty labor in the temporary storage trailers where they were housed. Though the King Records would require some conservation and additional archival arrangement, their gift to Special Collections & Archives represented the essential first step in making these important documents available to the public.¹¹⁴

By then the department may well have been considered to be in possession of the best surveying assemblage south of the General Land Office in Austin. A&M-Corpus Christi's Special Collections & Archives, it should be noted, also possessed numerous surveying maps that were simply part of some of its other manuscript holdings, though fugitive maps do not truly constitute a surveying collection. But the CBSC was the foundation upon which this stature was constructed.

Building and administering such unique documentary evidence requires resources. Often such resources mean a hefty budget and staff, not to mention adequate space as allocated by the library and university. As previously noted, the department had brought to bear a variety of such assets in a strategic manner to gain a level of archival control over the Blucher Family Papers and its series the CBSC with the intent of preserving and making these materials accessible. Resources, however, were always less than adequate. Indeed, making progress even more remarkable was the fact that the library administrations over the years only provided paraprofessional positions for such effective employees

as Pam Durrwachter, Norman Zimmerman, Alva Neer, Jan Weaver, Grace Charles and others, all who received pay at minimum grades. Also, Special Collections normally carried only two paraprofessionals. The department otherwise utilized student workers. Kreneck (as Medley before him) served as the unit's only professional level employee. Such short-shrift was a constant reminder that Special Collections & Archives, as it managed the Blucher project and handled its many other tasks, operated with subpar funding. With varying degrees of emphasis, however, the staff — through extra effort — continued to be creative and productive with the Blucher materials well into the 2000s.

A significant step in control and access came in 2006 when the opportunity presented itself for moving the CBSC to the second floor Special Collections closed stack area. By March, yet again a new library director, this one appointed by the university provost after Abby Kratz departed, decided on another use for the space on the first floor occupied by the CBSC. Accordingly, the library allocated funds to purchase four new oversize metal file cabinets adequate to house the majority of the CBSC maps; university personnel then installed these containers within the more secure second floor closed stacks. Between March and August, staff members Jan Weaver and Grace Charles supervised the move by student workers Francisco Guerra, Daniel Rosales, Audrey Flores Garza, and Gloria Peña of all the CBSC items (along with other collections) from the first floor. The journey of the CBSC from its original home in the County Surveyor's Office in 1994, and finally into the safest

and most staff accessible area of the Special Collections & Archives, was now complete. Surveying professor Stacey Lyle even provided upper level GIS student volunteers to inventory the newly transferred maps to check for missing items.¹¹⁵

As added courtesy, Kreneck and Weaver hosted members of the Blucher donors to view the original cabinets and other furniture that had come with the CBSC to determine if they wished any of it be returned to the family. Though they declined the tables, chairs, and vintage cabinets, such a courtesy by archival staff was part of the good faith which the department and Blucher heirs always dealt with one another.¹¹⁶

Eighteen years of active collecting during Kreneck's tenure had raised the number of other collections held by the department from approximately twenty (20) in 1990 to no fewer than two hundred eight (208) by 2009. As well, hundreds of more linear feet had been added to pre-existing collections. Amid these acquisitions and the broadened activities of Special Collections, the departmental staff planned renewed emphasis on the Blucher materials. Indeed, by 2009, correspondence, historic photographs, and other documents within the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, not counting the CBSC, amounted to a critical mass of one hundred twenty-one (121) boxes of varying dimensions.¹¹⁷

During October 2009, Kreneck and staff members Grace

Charles and Cecilia Venable (the latter recently hired for her archival management ability, though at the usual paraprofessional rank) met to plan for commencing the enhanced processing of the Blucher Family Papers. This meeting took place in response to the ongoing partnership between Kreneck and Jeffress. By then in the position of director of the Conrad Blucher Institute, Jeffress continued his active interest in supporting Special Collections as it involved all the Blucher research materials, now extending well beyond the CBSC.¹¹⁸

In November, Jeffress allocated \$5,000 to carry forward the archival processing of the Blucher Family Papers. After gaining administrative approval, Kreneck recruited Audrey Flores Garza, who had previously been on the staff of Special Collections, to do this part time, temporary project. An outstanding processor, Flores Garza eagerly accepted the assignment. Once again budgetary resources came into play, and as before funding was forthcoming from the CBI rather than the library, the latter's administration by 2010 professing financial shortfalls, much like the rest of the campus.¹¹⁹

In January 2010, Flores Garza commenced work on the Blucher Family Papers and made headway in taking the collection to a new level of access. She reviewed the contents of the 121 boxes, created a concise, upgraded inventory of them, and began to bring advanced organization to the materials, especially the family correspondence. Kreneck and Flores Garza held a formal meeting on January 21 with Jeffress to brief him thoroughly on how the CBI funds

were being utilized. Thereafter, Flores Garza organized the materials to an even finer degree. She discovered the World War I letters of two of the Blucher men (whose contents intrigued her), located family diaries, and encapsulated many oversized items. She even encountered Charles von Blucher surveying documents that supplemented the CBSC, while sorting out a vast array of other items the collection contained. Such processing is slow and tedious, but deliberate progress was made. ¹²⁰

Along the way, Flores Garza paged items in the Blucher Family Papers for an A&M-Corpus Christi history graduate student working on her master's thesis, hosted two faculty members to review documents that had been discovered within that holding, and worked over a three day period with community researchers conducting independent inquiry. This final lengthy visit necessitated the department gaining permission from the designated representative of the Blucher family to examine the Maria von Blucher letters as prescribed in the 1996 donor agreement. Thus, the Blucher Family Papers were never silent under the care of Flores Garza and her fellow staff members. ¹²¹

Origins of the CBSC Scanning Project, 2010

Meanwhile, plans to digitize the CBSC took the form of a project in 2010. The idea first began in 1996 when Jeffress, while meeting with Kreneck to view parts of the Blucher surveying materials, noted that the collection needed to be placed online. As both a computer science and surveying professor, Jeffress understood better than anyone else on campus the possibilities for such access. Kreneck wholeheartedly concurred. After consulting with Charles Irby, Director of Computer Services on campus, and through other inquiries, however, Jeffress and Kreneck determined that such a scanning project at that time was economically unfeasible and that they would have to wait. In 2010, happily, the technical ability for digitizing the CBSC had become within budgetary reach, and financial resources for such a goal became available. It was CBI Director Jeffress, William Nichols, and Seneca Holland, the latter two of the University's newly-created Harte Research

Institute, who formulated a plan for such a project and mustered the determination to carry it forward, and with the full cooperation of Special Collections.

When Nichols had been an undergraduate, Jeffress had discussed with him the idea of scanning the CBSC. By 2010, Nichols worked with Seneca Holland in the HRI's GIS laboratory. Holland was already analyzing old shoreline and bathymetric maps and saw need for a scanner to create images for overlays. Nichols and Holland huddled over the idea to obtain such hardware for both the CBI and the HRI and came back to Jeffress with the proposal. To initiate such a massive endeavor, an initial meeting among Jeffress, Nichols, and Holland took place in early March 2010. They were to formalize the idea.¹²²

Later that month, Jeffress, Nichols, and Holland held another meeting, this time including Kreneck, to bring Special Collections directly into the proceedings. These representatives would thus form a partnership among the CBI, the HRI, and the Bell Library. Subsequently, on a joint 50-50 cost basis, HRI and CBI purchased two large scanners capable of reproducing the materials. In April, Nichols and Holland met with Kreneck to review the CBSC to assess its volume and the size of the individual documents. In June, Holland submitted a written comprehensive plan for the joint scanning project. Other gatherings transpired among these four principal individuals, and included other representatives of the three campus agencies: their purpose, to work out proper details for online storage. The final meeting took place on September 10, where among

other particulars, Jeffress of the CBI allocated funds that allowed Special Collections to elevate Audrey Flores Garza from part time processor of the Blucher Family Papers to a full-time position (the other half having been assumed by the Bell Library). This move allowed Flores Garza to spend half of each work day carting CBSC materials to the HRI where the scanners were located. (No stranger to digitization, Flores Garza had previously scanned and placed online for Special Collections several smaller historic photograph collections which Kreneck and she had identified as high profile.)

On October 1, 2010, the CBSC scanning project commenced thanks to a smooth working relationship among the three entities and the essential financial resources being provided by Jeffress. Once again, STEM related money allowed good ideas to be implemented.¹²³

The CBSC naturally had become the first of the surveying materials held by A&M-Corpus Christi to be scanned because it was the dominant such collection. It was the richest in content, the most often accessed, and crucially the most thoroughly processed for ready access. Blucher Institute resources may have facilitated the scanning project, but the quality of the collection served as the genesis of the endeavor. In short, in 2010, the CBSC was the foremost surveying collection that A&M-Corpus Christi owned.

This project initially aimed to place the entire CBSC online. The four large index volumes were the first items to be scanned, then to be followed by CBSC's

other components. Scanning the huge collection ranked as the most significant digitization project underway on the campus. ¹²⁴

The employment arrangement of Flores Garza continued throughout 2011, as she advanced in sorting the Blucher Family Papers and refining her inventory. Likewise, great progress was made on the CBSC scanning project, as Flores Garza and company completed the contents of multiple map drawers. However, as is the case in such painstaking digitizing efforts, hardware problems occasionally surfaced. No matter how thoroughly Flores Garza tried to clean the aging maps, accumulated quartz on them often scratched the scanner's glass, thus periodically bringing the process to a stop. ¹²⁵

In part a response to the group's collective work on the Blucher materials as well as its ongoing close association with Patricia Green (Kreneck and Jeffress kept her abreast of its progress), by the end of 2011, Mrs. Green, with support from her son Billy and his spouse Joyce, had decided to donate her massive surveying records to Special Collections & Archives. On December 1, 2011, the department, the library, and the Conrad Blucher Institute held a formal donation ceremony luncheon for the William W. (Bill) and Patricia Green Surveying Records at the Blucher Institute. In many ways, the occasion was a culmination of Kreneck and Jeffress' association with Patricia and Bill Green over the past two decades, again underscoring how long-term honorable interaction with donors is essential in building research resources. ¹²⁶

For personal reasons, Flores Garza had to cease her half-

day work on the CBSC scanning project in December 2011, but before doing so submitted to Seneca Holland a lengthy written description of her procedures and briefed staff of the CBI and Harte Institute regarding these instructions. Beginning in January 2012, Blucher Institute employee Lillian Reitz assumed the role Flores Garza had performed in conveying the CBSC materials to the Harte Institute, with Flores Garza acting in an advisory capacity. These actions made for a smooth transition of duties and for continuing the project as flawlessly as possible.¹²⁷

Flores Garza continued on part time with the Blucher Family Papers until she left the employ of Special Collections & Archives at the end of April 2012. Before departing, she worked extensively with an advanced history graduate student from the University of Texas at San Antonio. This visiting scholar, working on her thesis regarding German Americans, planned to make the Blucher materials a large part of her research, another example of the Blucher voices being heard.¹²⁸

Always conscientious, Flores Garza had made great headway in arranging, boxing, and creating a written preliminary finding guide to the Blucher Family Papers, which by the time she departed filled around one hundred fifty (150) linear feet of shelf space. She briefed Kreneck extensively on her progress, and placed her results on the proper library computer drive to facilitate efforts on finalizing the materials. As noted in the department's official monthly report: "Her inventories will ... be a valuable tool for the future processor of the papers in bringing full

archival control to the collection.” In preparation for her departure, she worked with Grace Charles assiduously to consolidate the Blucher Family Papers for continued ready access. Flores Garza likewise updated Kreneck on April 30 (her final day of employment) on the CBSC scanning project so that he could be the direct contact with Lillian Reitz, who by then was transporting the maps to the scanners.¹²⁹

Kreneck’s days as head of Special Collections & Archives would come to an end in 2012 as well. In addition to tending to the usual plethora of other responsibilities, Kreneck’s final months would include some other important actions dealing with surveying records associated with the CBSC and with the Blucher Family Papers.

As an extension of his work with the CBSC, in early January 2012, Kreneck boxed and conveyed the vast majority of the William W. and Patricia Green Surveying Records to Special Collections (approximately fifty-three linear feet). These records included job files, field books and oversized maps. These holdings not only contained Mr. Green’s materials while Nueces County surveyor, 1954-1994, but also items created by A. M. French, an early surveyor from the local area, as well as several original Felix A. Blucher maps. So prominent were the collection and the Green couple in Corpus Christi that a report of this acquisition aired on T.V. Channel 3 News at 6 p.m. on January 12.

Every inch an endeavor that had involved many individuals along the way, obtaining the Greens’ materials was the final separate collection retrieved in the field by

Kreneck during his two-decade residence at A&M-Corpus Christi. The work, though difficult, was made pleasant by being in the company of Patricia Green for the television interview as well as interacting with her during the transfer of the records. At the library, Graduate Assistant Sean Mooney and student workers Jared Miller and Mitch Winters assisted in unloading many of these heavy oversized maps and placing them in secure Special Collections closed stack areas.

Kreneck and Jeffress, the latter welcoming the acquisition of the papers, also acquired Bill Green's surveying instruments for the Blucher Institute's exhibit area, where the Blucher transits and other hardware were displayed. Kreneck would return in late April to Patricia Green's home to retrieve a residue of the Green materials.¹³⁰

In between the Green acquisitions, in March 2012, Medora Blucher conveyed two final, significant additions to the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers; they included paintings that dated from the time of Felix and Maria von Blucher, as well as fifteen (15) cubic feet of nineteenth and twentieth century family documents and photographs. As always, the process was methodical, with Mrs. Blucher telephoning Kreneck of the materials' readiness and Kreneck ferrying the materials from her home on Wilshire to Special Collections, there to be officially accessioned, and filed with the Blucher Family Papers.¹³¹

The Blucher addition in March and the Green conveyance in January and April culminated twenty-two years of Kreneck's work with both families. For him, these

transactions underscored the importance of a long-term commitment to an institution by an archive professional — well beyond tenures of several months or several years. Such associations also speak to the benefit of an institution acting in good faith with community people who have materials that they are willing to donate. Kreneck departed during the summer of 2012, and left the ongoing care of the Blucher research materials for his successors in Special Collections & Archives. The work on the scanning project also continued through the productive efforts of the department, the CBI, and Harte Institute.

In his career as an archivist historian, Kreneck had never dealt with a better group of donors and supporters than the Blucher heirs, the Green family, Gary Jeffress, and the many other individuals who contributed to the department's acquisition of the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers and its series, the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection. That association had brought to a critical mass one of the most significant research resources owned by Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



A Post-2012 Conclusion

From mid-2012 through mid-2014, the Blucher Family Papers continued to be maintained by staff and accessed by patrons, though archival processing of the collection remained at a standstill. During that period staff levels for Special Collections & Archives had unfortunately experienced reductions. Not only did the library administration not fill the vacancy of head of Special Collections for two years, but the staff dwindled at times to only one paraprofessional and a varying number of student workers. At the same time, however, the CBSC scanning project soldiered on. CBI and Harte Institute personnel diligently worked in conjunction with existing departmental employees to incorporate more and more items into its growing database.

In 2014, the situation for the Blucher holdings began to improve rapidly. By August 2014, Ann Hodges, a seasoned professional from the University of Texas at Arlington,

was hired as Director of Special Collections & Archives. Simultaneously, Dr. Catherine Rudowsky came on board as the new director of the Bell Library. Together, they began to increase and re-energize the departmental staffing, including the hiring of an additional professional position. They also placed renewed focus on the Blucher Family Papers. Hodges and Rudowsky likewise involved themselves deeply with digitizing the CBSC.¹³²

Of great importance in 2014, the Blucher Institute and the Bell Library jointly obtained a major grant from the local Ed Rachal Foundation for the CBSC digitizing enterprise. This windfall came through initial contacts made by Jaime Nodarse of the University's Office of Institutional Advancement, Dr. Richard Smith, director of the CBI's Spatial {Query} Lab, and Dr. Gary Jeffress with Paul D. Altheide, one of the Foundation's principal officers. Such financial assistance had again come from an outside source supporting STEM projects. The funding allowed the CBI to accelerate the effort through hiring nine students to handle the maps and other materials as well as to enter the metadata on the individual items. The grant also allowed the project to purchase improved scanners. Richard Smith, CBI research specialist Bryan Gillis (who Smith had hired), and Special Collections head Ann Hodges created and continually updated the workflow procedures. Having been supportive of the scanning project since it began in 2010, Smith not only enthusiastically headed the large team of CBI personnel, but admirably interfaced with the Rachal Foundation

through reports apprising that subsidizing agency on progress made through its investment.¹³³

At the request of the Bell Library and to accommodate the metadata and scanned CBSC images, Richard Smith, Bryan Gillis, and a team of programmers created a remarkable software called BandoCat, which would serve as a land records digital management system. This robust web-based platform provided a virtual workspace to catalog, store, transcribe, georectify, and publish maps and documents. The effort to place the CBSC online assumed high gear.¹³⁴

On July 13, 2018, a reception was held in the Special Collections & Archives area celebrating the digitization of 100,000 surveying documents, a major milestone to be sure. In addition to the Blucher materials, the large maps within the Green records and some from various other collections had also been scanned into the system. By 2018, BandoCat and its contents had been opened for public use. The ambitious project envisioned digitizing all the surveying holdings of Special Collections, including the George and Lynn King documents and others. Funding by the Rachal Foundation came to an end in 2019, but much progress had been accomplished by the cooperating partners.¹³⁵

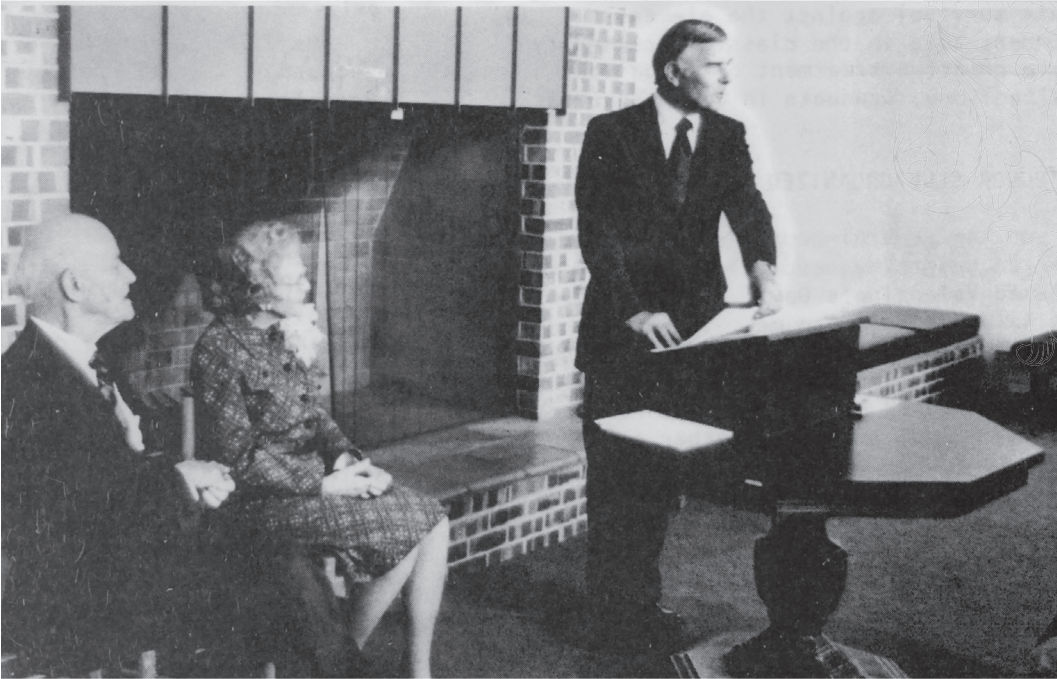
After Ann Hodges departed at the end of 2018, the University in June 2019, hired Lori Atkins as Director of Special Collections & Archives. Atkins had served with distinction as head of the South Texas Archives at nearby Texas A&M University-Kingsville and she brought renewed energy to handling the Blucher manuscripts. With an increasing number of staff and with the ongoing support

of by then Dean of Libraries Rudowsky, Atkins secured significant funding in 2020 from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services through a TexTreasures Grant from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (Grant # TXT-21011) (2021) for the upkeep of the Blucher Family Papers. This financing was specifically designed to bring to completion the archival processing and select digitization of the personal and business records.¹³⁶

These post-2014 developments represented exciting steps forward in the constantly evolving digital world of archival management. But the details of events after 2014 and the people involved merit a separate essay on the history of creating, acquiring, and managing the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers and its series the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection. It is an extension of a family saga that first began with Felix and Maria von Blucher in the 1840s and has continued well into the twenty-first century.

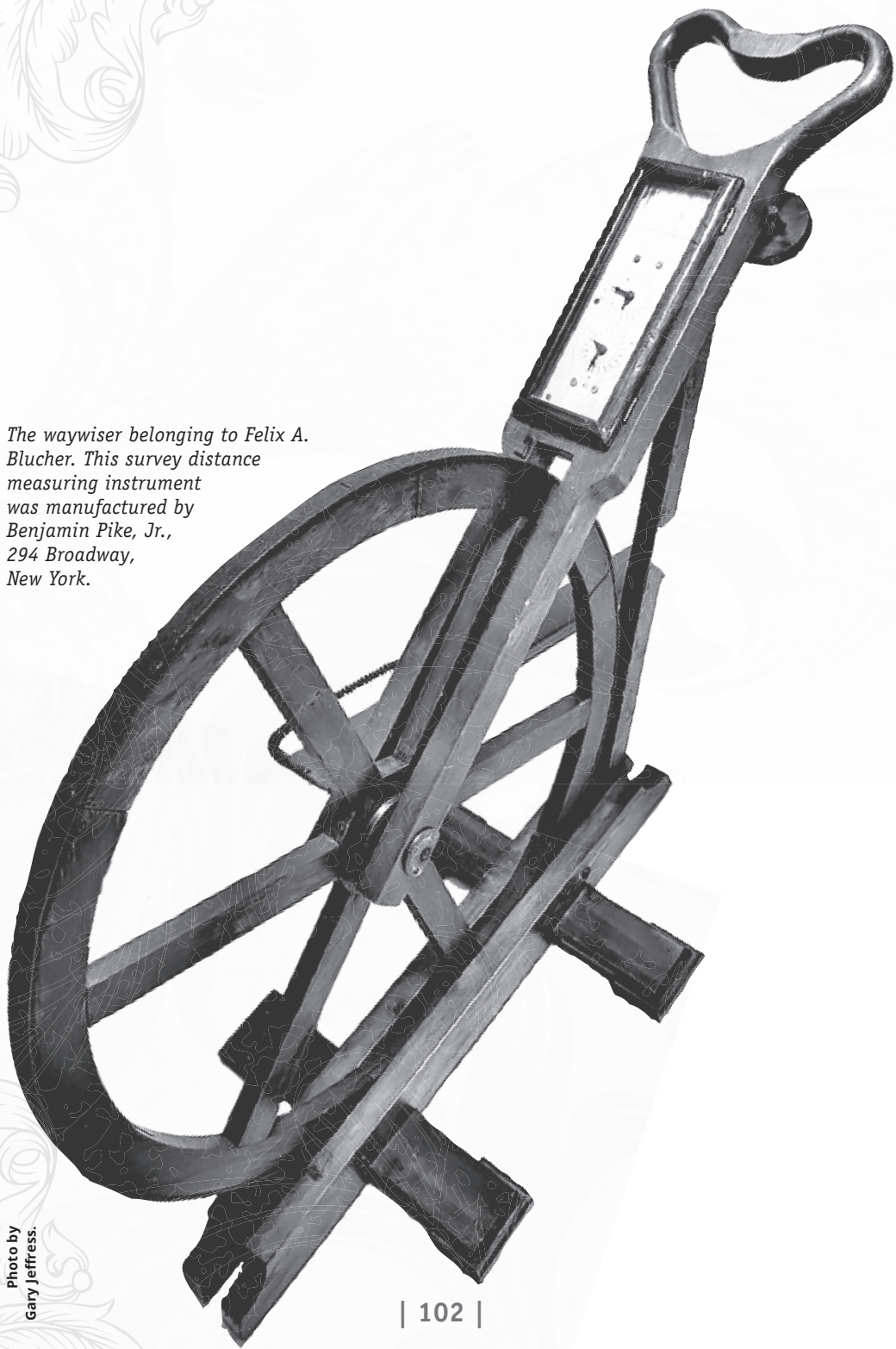


Conrad M. and Zula Hill Blucher, whose bequest to Texas A&I University at Corpus Christi during the 1970s led to the establishment of the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science and to the donation of the Blucher surveying records. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



President D. Whitney Halladay (standing) of Texas A&I University at Corpus Christi accepting the Blucher endowment at the reception for Conrad M. and Zula Hill Blucher (both seated), January, 1976. Blucher Donor File, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

The waywiser belonging to Felix A. Blucher. This survey distance measuring instrument was manufactured by Benjamin Pike, Jr., 294 Broadway, New York.





Map entitled Sketch of the Lands Belonging to the Rancho de los Laureles in Nueces Co, Texas, owned by Capt. M. Kenedy, Felix A. Blucher, Corpus Christi, May 25, 1869. Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Santa Gertrudis, Nueces Co, Texas,
July 16th 1874.
F. A. Blucher Esq.
Dear Sir:

I am Compelled to remove and extend my Santa Gertrudis-pasture-fences, for which purpose W. A. Caldwell is now here. I am also very anxious to permanently establish and fix the boundary lines or Corners of all my lands in this vicinity so, and would be pleased to have you come here at once or as speedily as possible to assist W. Caldwell in the completion of the work and who I am satisfied will be more than pleased to have your valuable assistance and extended information, for which I will pay you when naming your price. I hope you will be pleased to come at once so we can have a pleasant friendly talk over these and other matters which I trust may prove, and be mutually beneficial.

Yours Very Truly
R. King

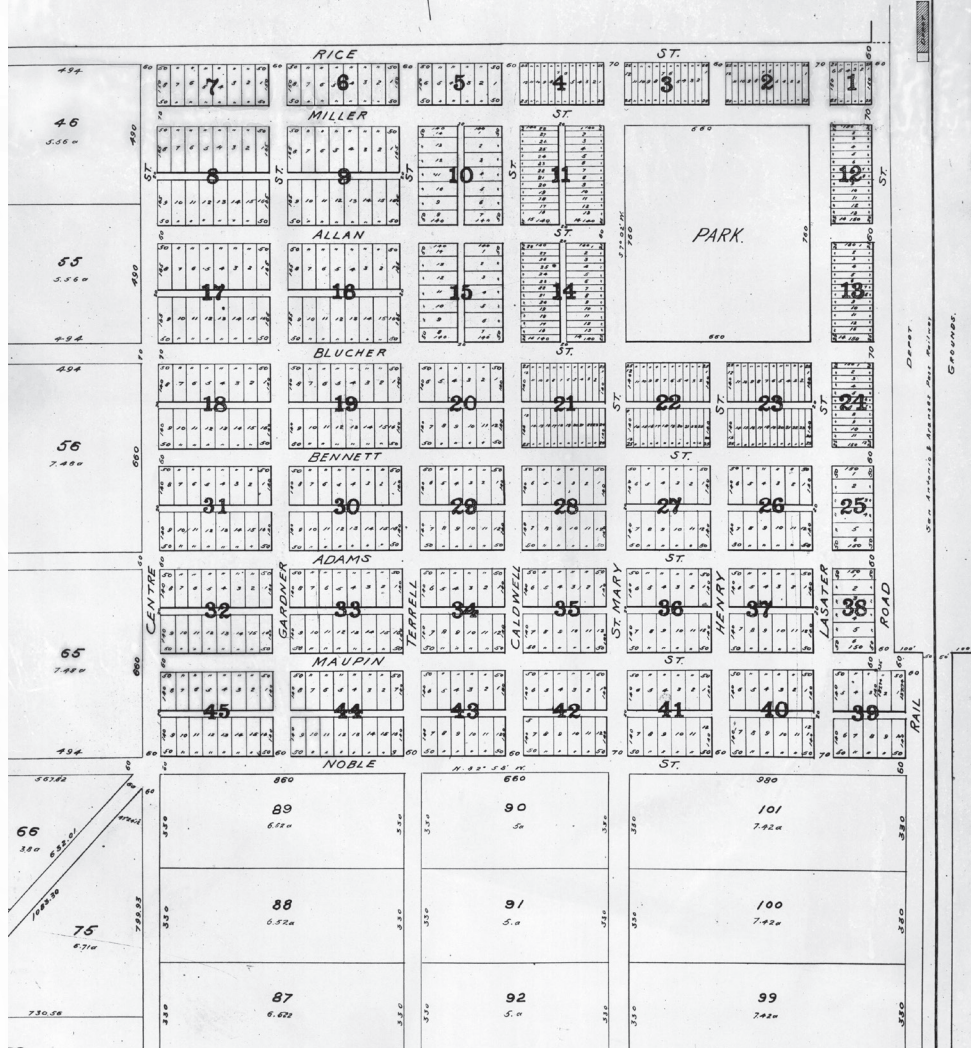
Letter from Richard King penned at his Rancho Santa Gertrudis (the storied King Ranch) to Felix A. Blucher, May 10, 1874. Written by King's secretary, the letter bears King's distinctive signature. Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



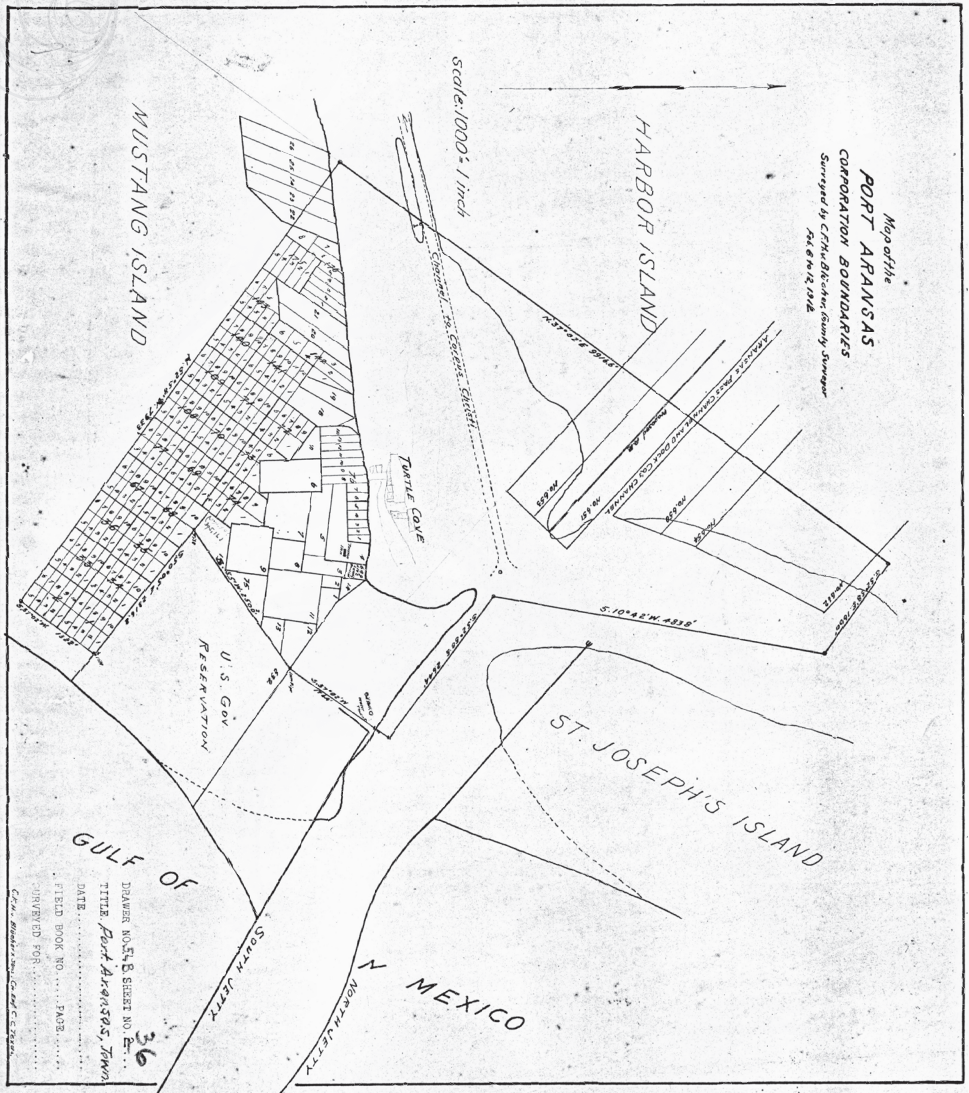
Attendees at the May 17, 1995 reception where copies of the 1871 Santa Gertrudis Estate (King Ranch) map were presented to the Blucher family donors. l. to r.: Dr. Gary Jeffress, William W. (Bill) Green, Dr. Robert Wooster, Patricia Green, Willie J. Kosarek, George A. Blucher, Jr., Edward B. Derry, Claudia Blucher Harrel, Mary Julia Blucher Jordan, Rhonda Bosquez, Gloria Blucher Alexander, Medora Blucher, and Dr. Thomas H. Kreneck. Photo courtesy of Thomas H. Kreneck.

MAP OF THE TOWN OF FALFURRIAS

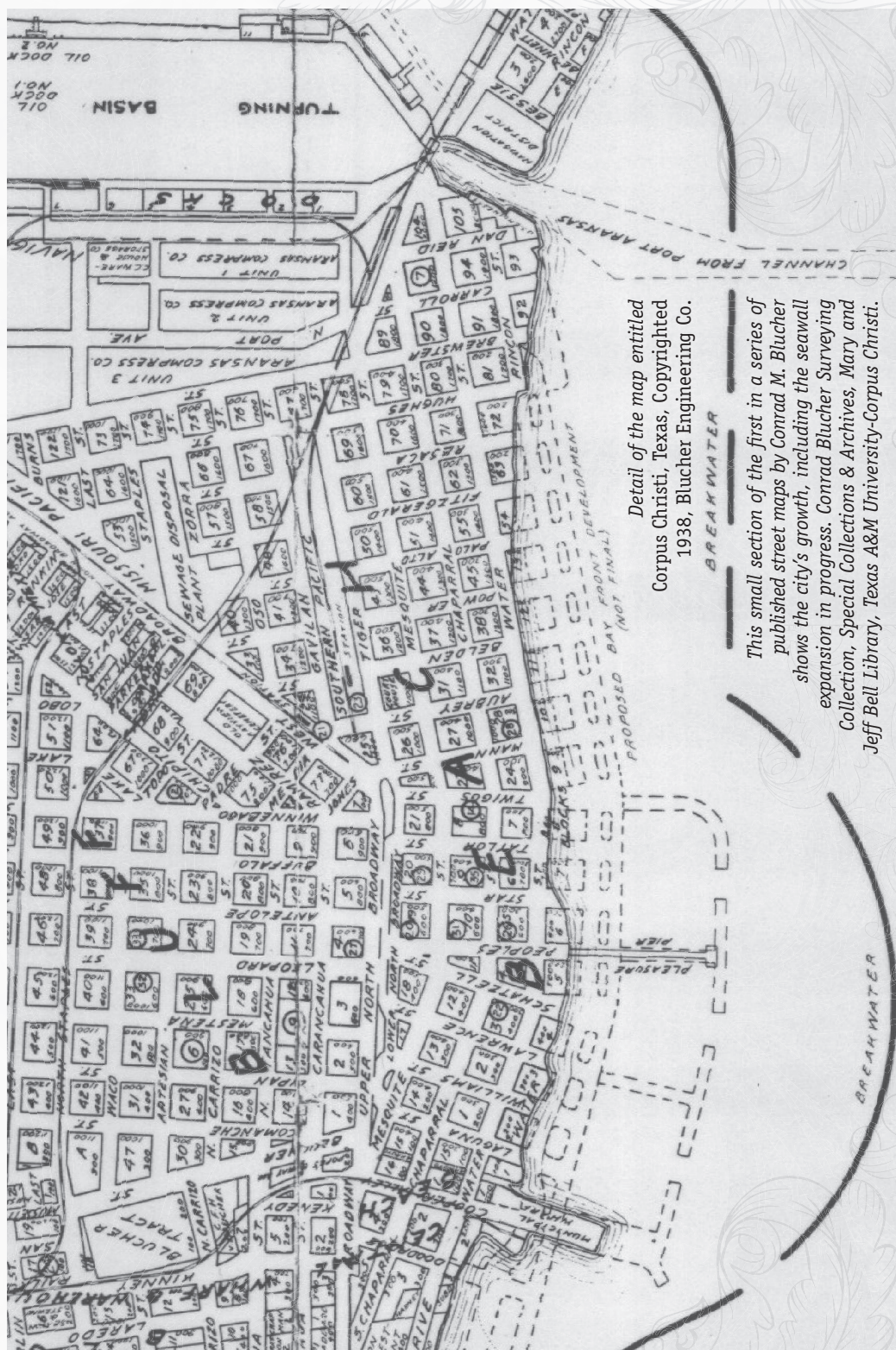
ON THE
San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway,
Starr Co., Texas
Showing the Town lots, and Acreage lots.
Surveyed by C. F. H. v. Blucher, June and July, 1904.
Scale: 200 feet to One Inch.



Map of the Town of Falfurrias on the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway, Starr Co., Texas, Showing the Town lots, and Acreage lots, Surveyed by C. F. H. v. Blucher, June and July, 1904. Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Map of the Port Aransas Corporation Boundaries Surveyed by C. F. H. von Blucher, County Surveyor, Feb. 8 to 12, 1912. Charles Blucher played a significant role in establishing local towns. Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Detail of the map entitled
Corpus Christi, Texas, Copyrighted
1938, Blucher Engineering Co.

This small section of the first in a series of published street maps by Conrad M. Blucher shows the city's growth, including the seawall expansion in progress. Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Blucher: A Family, a Legacy, and a Research Resource
at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi



Photos by Thomas H. Kreneck.

Patricia Green and William W. (Bill) Green reviewing a map in the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, 1991. The Green couple not only took care of the CBSC, but also donated their own voluminous survey records to A&M-Corpus Christi.



A sampling of the Blucher Family Papers shows a wide variety of documents chronicling the history of South Texas.

Notes

- 1 Maria von Blucher, *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi: Letters from the South Texas Frontier, 1849-1879*, Edited and Annotated by Bruce S. Cheeseman, Foreword by Thomas H. Kreneck (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 5.
- 2 Ibid., 5.
- 3 Ibid., 3-5; Charles F. H. von Blucher, "My Mother" (unpublished manuscript dated October 20, 1935), Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.
- 4 Blucher, *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi: Letters from the South Texas Frontier, 1849-1879*, 5-6; Lebrecht v. Blucher, *The Texas Bluchers: Anton Felix von Blucher (1819-1879), a Texas Pioneer of Corpus Christi, and his descendants* (Germany: Blucher Verlag, 1999), 8. Based on the author's research, it seems that family members over the generations did not consistently use the term von in their surname, some individuals preferring to go simply by Blucher.
- 5 Charles F. H. von Blucher (unpublished manuscript dated Feb. 26, 1929 about his father), Blucher Family Papers; Blucher, *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi: Letters from the South Texas Frontier, 1849-1879*, 6; Hortense Warner Ward, "Blücher, Anton Felix Hans Hellmuth Von (1819-1879)," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/blucher-anton-felix-hans-hellmuth-von> (accessed 9/10/2020); Blucher, *The Texas Bluchers*, 57-58.

- 6 Blucher, *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi: Letters from the South Texas Frontier, 1849-1879*, 6-7; Charles F. H. von Blucher (unpublished manuscript dated Feb. 26, 1929 about his father), Blucher Family Papers.
- 7 Blucher, *Maria von Blucher's Corpus Christi: Letters from the South Texas Frontier, 1849-1879*, 8-9.
- 8 Ibid., xv, 9, 17-18.
- 9 Ibid., 18-19.
- 10 Charles F. H. von Blucher, "The Old Mesquite Tree" (unpublished manuscript dated February 12, 1933) and (unpublished manuscript dated July 28, 1929 about the arrival of his parents in Corpus Christi), Blucher Family Papers; Blucher, *The Texas Bluchers*, 59.
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