

Battalion Classifieds

Man constructs dinosaur from paper-mache, data

NEEDVILLE (AP) — John Fischner's tools are scientific data, imagination and papier-mache. His overriding obsession is to use those tools to bring back to life a group of animals long extinct — dinosaurs.

Fischner, whose home and studio are about 35 miles southwest of Houston, has found a niche in life sculpting dinosaurs and fantasy figures.

"I keep thinking what was it like to see a herd of animals where each individual was the size of a railroad car, what was it like to see a predator so big that when he ate, he was pulling off 200 to 300 pounds of meat at a time. Every time I sculpt one of these things, I'm kind of exploring what it would be like to see it."

— John Fischner

"I keep thinking what was it like to see a herd of animals where each individual was the size of a railroad car, what was it like to see a predator so big that when he ate, he was pulling off 200 to 300 pounds of meat at a time," he said, his enthusiasm for the thought growing.

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tile that is 20 feet long and 9 feet tall. All of the creatures move and roar.

Fischner's dinosaurs will be displayed in miniature landscape settings and will complement the larger robotic displays that will be the main attraction of the exhibit, said Warren Zager, associate director of exhibits for the museum.

Zager praised Fischner's work. "Fabulous stuff; the man does his research," Zager said. "We really appreciate him letting us show his art work here."

Three years ago, Fischner won a contract to repair the dinosaurs at Dinosaur Valley State Park near Glen Rose.

The experience was overwhelming, he said.

"It's one thing to sit in here and work on one . . . looking like a toy. It's something else . . . leaning inside this mouth—head, shoulders and waist and not reaching to the back of the tongue," he said.

Fischner, 37 dates his fascination for dinosaurs back to age 3, when someone gave him "The World Live In," a book published by Life magazine. A fold-out page with pictures of dinosaurs captivated him, he said. For hours on end, he would study the page and let his imagination run. When he was 6 he began sculpting dinosaurs using domestic clay.

At 16 he started using a cellulose papier-mache material that can be dried to a hard state. He has refined his technique.

Starting with pieces of coat hangers bound with floral wire, Fischner forms the basic shape of the body. The body is filled out with wadded newspaper. A fast-setting papier-mache is used to fill out the legs.

To that basic frame he applied the cellulose papier-mache material, which is a wood pulp powder that mixes with water. Slowly the animal is built up.

Cemetery reminds Texas of port

BAYSIDE (AP) — Just north of this quiet bayside town on Farm Road 136 is a sign that points to Old St. Mary's Cemetery.

The cemetery, nestled in a motte of live oak trees, has been there for 131 years, and it's about the only tangible evidence left of what was once known as the busiest port along the Texas Coast and the lumber mart of the Southwest.

Back down the road here in town is the John H. Wood mansion, which was on the edge of St. Mary's but was not a part of the original town. It's just that St. Mary's was such a thriving port in the 1870s that it stretched two or three miles along the Copano Bay, with the Wood mansion at the southwest end of town.

St. Mary's almost became the county seat of Refugio County. The town thrived from its inception in 1857 until the storm of 1886 all but did her in. The 1875 storm dealt the town a crushing blow, but the townspeople rebuilt.

By 1886, when the second devastating hurricane hit, the upstart town of Rockport was becoming an important port. It was on Aransas Bay and much closer to the Gulf than St. Mary's. To get to St. Mary's, ships had to cross Aransas Bay and Copano Bay and negotiate a long reef.

The townspeople did little rebuilding after the second hurricane. Instead, they moved away.

It wasn't until about 20 years later that the present town of Bayside appeared on the Copano Bay shore.

Today it stretches a couple of miles along the shore and takes in part of what was St. Mary's. The part of town northeast of Division Street is known as the St. Mary's addition to Bayside.

Back at the cemetery, a historical plaque tells the visitor that Joseph F. Smith, nephew of Henry Smith, who was a provisional governor of Texas, founded the town of St. Mary's in 1857. The earliest marked grave is dated 1860.

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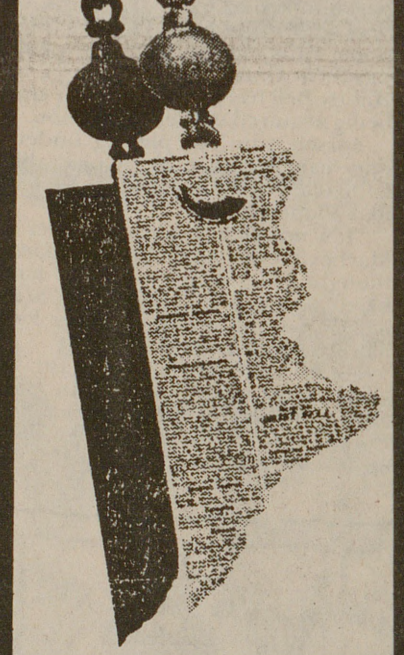
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