



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
MEDIA CONTACT  
Lindsay Muncy  
Marketing@TheStoryOfTexas.com

## Bullock Museum to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of *La Belle* with free public event

H-E-B Free First Sunday will highlight the 17<sup>th</sup>-century French shipwreck discovered in 1995 off the Texas coast

**JULY 1, 2025 (AUSTIN, TX)** — The Bullock Museum will celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of *La Belle*, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century French shipwreck found off the Texas coast, with free exhibition admission and family activities at H-E-B Free First Sunday on Sunday, July 6 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"It's so exciting to celebrate this milestone in the journey of *La Belle*, the ship that was said to have changed the course of Texas history," said Margaret Koch, Director of the Bullock Museum. "After 300 plus years, it continues to be a turning point in our understanding of the past, and the Bullock is honored to share its remarkable story with the public."

The ship *La Belle* began its journey in 1684 as one of four ships in René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle's (1643-1687) ultimately failed expedition to establish a French colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Due to poorly drawn maps, La Salle's expedition landed in what is now Matagorda Bay, Texas. In 1686, *La Belle*, the last of La Salle's ships, wrecked in a violent storm and sank to the bottom of Matagorda Bay where it remained for the next 300 years.



In 1995, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) confirmed the location of the 17<sup>th</sup> century French shipwreck in a remote area along the southern shore of Matagorda Bay. From 1996 to 1997, THC conducted a full recovery of the ship's hull along with more 1.6 million artifacts in one of the most extraordinary engineering feats ever associated with an underwater archaeological excavation. A steel cofferdam constructed around the shipwreck permitted the excavation to proceed as if on muddy land — the first time a dewatered cofferdam excavation had been conducted in the Western Hemisphere. Once excavated, the ship and its artifacts were then transferred to labs at Texas A&M in College Station to undergo preservation treatments.

The Bullock Museum owes its creation in part to *La Belle* with the Museum's structure and layout created specifically to accommodate the ship. Although the Museum opened in 2001 and featured the La Salle expedition's history in the first floor gallery, it wasn't until July 2014 that

-more-

the 53-foot, 800-pound keel of *La Belle* made its final voyage to the Bullock. The ship was then reassembled at the Museum as part of a seven-month exhibition in which visitors could watch the ship take shape. Moved into its permanent location in May 2015, the ship and its cargo are the central elements of the *Becoming Texas* exhibition on the Museum's first floor.

Now, 30 years after its initial discovery, the Bullock Museum invites visitors to celebrate *La Belle* on Sunday, July 6 during H-E-B Free First Sunday. In addition to free exhibition admission for all visitors, the Museum will have *La Belle*-themed drop-in craft stations and activities for adults and kids of all ages. Visitors can explore *La Belle* in the Museum's *Becoming Texas* gallery through augmented reality experiences, interactives and videos about the ship's excavation and conservation.

H-E-B Free First Sunday at the Bullock will take place on Sunday, July 6. Free exhibition admission is from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. *La Belle*-themed family activities are from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information about the event and the story of *La Belle*, visit [TheStoryofTexas.com](http://TheStoryofTexas.com).

# # #

H-E-B Free First Sundays presented by H-E-B.

*La Belle* and its artifacts are the property of France from the collection of the Musée National de la Marine on loan from the Texas Historical Commission

The Bullock Museum, a division of the Texas State Preservation Board, is funded by Museum members, donors, and patrons, the Texas State History Museum Foundation, and the State of Texas.

## **ABOUT THE BULLOCK MUSEUM**

The Bullock Texas State History Museum, a division of the State Preservation Board and an accredited institution of the American Alliance of Museums, illuminates and celebrates Texas history, people, and culture. With dynamic, award-winning exhibitions, educational programming for all ages, and an IMAX® theater with one of the largest screens in Texas, the Museum collaborates with more than 700 museums, libraries, archives and individuals across the world to bring the Story of Texas to life.