

Houston HISTORY

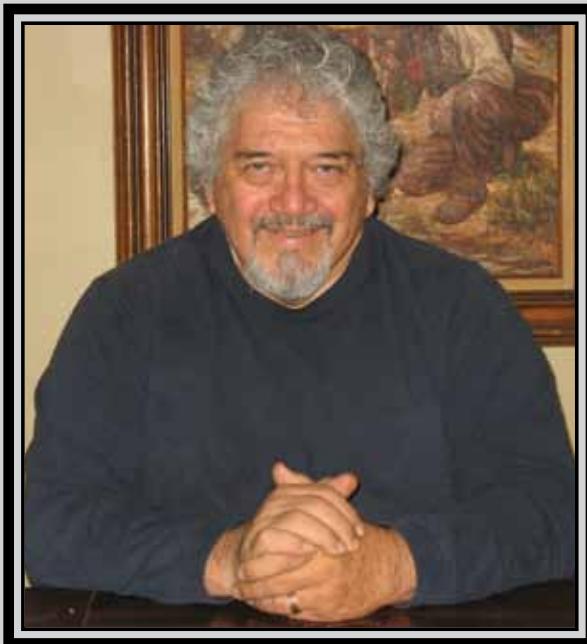
VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 2 • SPRING 2010

Theatre Arts



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

IN MEMORY OF ERNESTO VALDÉS



Sadly, we report that our friend and co-worker, Ernesto Valdés, died on March 20, 2010, of complications from a stroke. He worked with us at the Center for Public History on the Houston History Project for more than five years, the last two as Director of the UH Oral History of Houston. Ernesto was one-of-a-kind. He seemed to know everyone in the city as a result of his long career as a lawyer. He was a great storyteller who embraced the humanity in both the dark and the sunny sides of life. A gifted interviewer, he found people with interesting stories and let them talk. We will miss his humor, his lust for life, his love of history, and his infectious enthusiasm for an endless array of topics.

It would please Ernesto to know that he is becoming the Johnny Cash of interviewers, contributing articles from the great beyond in the way that recordings continue to come out from the late country singer. His lead article on the Hobby Center in this issue was completed only weeks ago. Our next issue will be built around a series of fascinating interviews conducted by Ernesto with Houstonians who stepped forward to help the refugees who came to our city after Hurricane Katrina. Ernesto started this project immediately after the hurricane with the goal of producing a fifth-anniversary commemoration of one of our city's finest hours. The completed issue this summer will be a fitting tribute to both our city and to Ernesto, who had a heart as big as Houston.

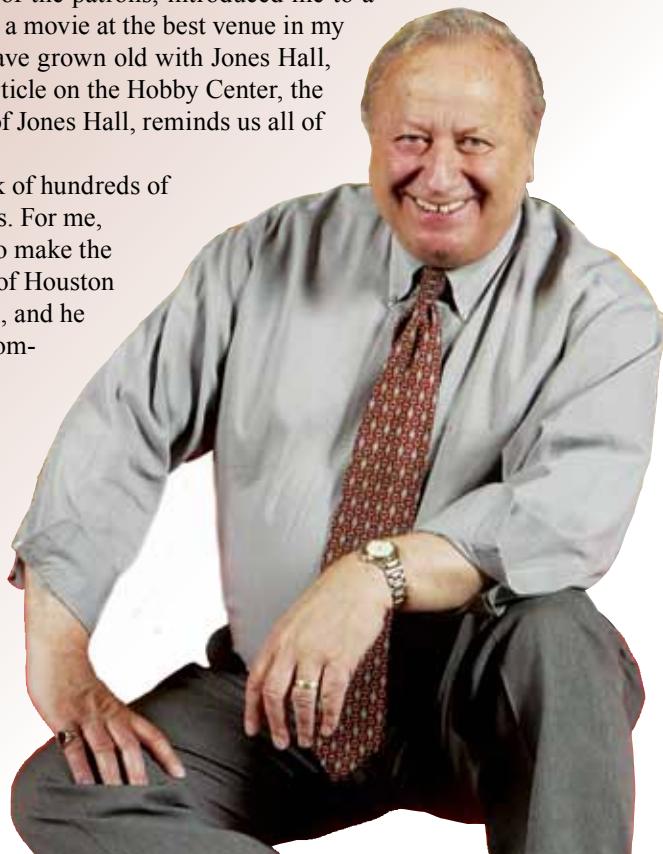
Our own heavy hearts go out to his wife, Carol, and to his family and friends. But they surely know, as do we, that our lasting memories of Ernesto will be of a warm, funny man who made the world a happier place.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR, Joseph A. Pratt

During my first year of college after moving from the small town of Port Neches, Texas, to the big city of Houston, a stranger handed me two tickets to a Louie Armstrong concert at the recently opened Jones Hall. I went. The elegance of the building, along with the expensive clothing of the patrons, introduced me to a new world of culture. This was a different experience from watching a movie at the best venue in my home town, the Naches Theater, a.k.a., the last picture show. As I have grown old with Jones Hall, it has remained for me the symbol of culture. Ernesto Valdés' lead article on the Hobby Center, the latest in a long line of temples of culture in Houston in the tradition of Jones Hall, reminds us all of the extraordinary venues that have helped build the arts in our city.

Over the years, however, it has become clearer to me that the work of hundreds of people dedicated to the arts has helped fill the seats in these buildings. For me, Sidney Berger is the face of all of those who have worked tirelessly to make the arts more accessible to Houstonians. Sidney came to the University of Houston in 1969 to take over the direction of the School of Theatre and Dance, and he built the school into a vibrant program with strong ties out into the community. Along the way, he created the Houston Shakespeare Festival and made it an important part of summer for many in our region. He also established the Children's Theatre Festival as a popular attraction that introduced many young people to plays. UH has awarded his work with its highest faculty honor, the Ester Farfel Award, and a position as the John and Rebecca Moores Professor of Theatre. The city and his profession have given him honors too numerous to mention. Houston would not be the same place without his lifetime of work on behalf of the arts—and his smiling face. To Sidney and all the other Houstonians who have helped make our city a cultural capital, we thank you.

Sidney Berger, photo courtesy of the University of Houston.



Houston History

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Cover Photo: The Houston Metropolitan Dance Center entertained Miller Outdoor Theatre audiences in 2009 with a "Summer Sampler of Dance." Photo courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Dance Company.

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NOW SHOWING: “ONE SINGULAR SENSATION...”

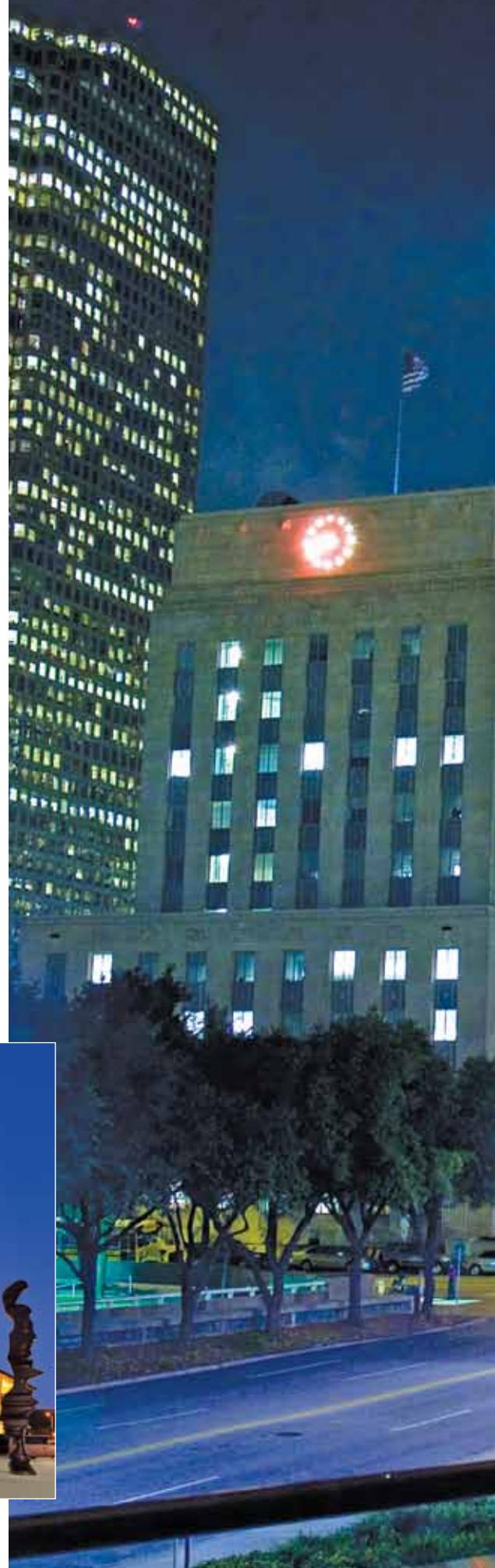
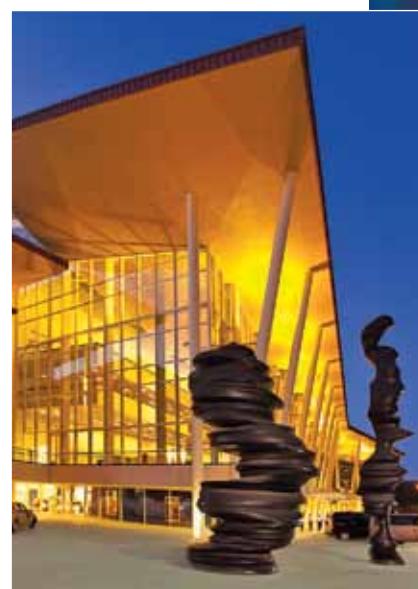
Tracing Houston Theatre from its Earliest Days
to the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts
by Ernesto Valdés

Representing the variety of performing arts, Houston's Theatre District reflects over one hundred and fifty years of regional theatre history. The thousands of European immigrants who came to Texas in the mid-nineteenth century brought with them their love of the performing arts, and almost immediately, they constructed crudely-built entertainment venues. Their ensuing efforts to establish legitimate theatre began with a tragedy followed by an array of theatres that came and went in a steady stream with the various forms of entertainment—orchestra, dance, drama, and vaudeville—sharing the same stage. This continued with the construction of the Music Hall in the 1930s, but by the end of the twentieth century, each genre had its own venue. Musical theatre remained housed in the Music Hall, while the Alley Theatre hosted plays and drama; Jones Hall became the home of the Houston Symphony Orchestra in 1966; and the Wortham Center opened in 1987 for the ballet and opera. Collectively these theatres, sharing a common history and artistic expression, became the largest theatre district in the nation outside of New York City. By the late 1990s, however, the Music Hall had become obsolete; and in 2002, it gave way to the city's newest venue, the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts.

Built along the south bank of Buffalo Bayou, the Hobby Center is one of the finest venues for musical theatre in the country. Audiences are greeted by a soaring façade of glass and lights that introduce a theatre with on-site parking and a five-star restaurant, making it a short walk from their table to their seat in the auditorium. The Hobby Center's state of the art technology attracts the senses with a seamless flow of music and dance that transports the audience into other times and places as only musical theatre can do. The stage echoes the history of traveling shows that included plays, vaudeville, burlesque, magicians, concerts, and Broadway musicals that tell stories of World War II sailors stuck on a South Pacific island, a young ingénue who visited the carnival and fell in love with a roguish carnie, a badly scarred but seductive phantom who haunted the opera house and lured its soprano into his self-imposed exile, or young gypsies who struggled for a chance to be on a Broadway chorus line.

An early evening shot of Hobby Center before the night's performance.

All photos courtesy of
Theatre Under The Stars unless otherwise noted.



Before the show, theatre patrons enjoy outdoor dinning and a view of downtown at the Arista Restaurant at the Hobby Center.





The Sweeny & Coombs Opera House, which opened on November 3, 1890, hosted Gilbert and Sullivan, and Sarah Bernhardt. On December 1, 1907, it burned to the ground with several other blocks of downtown Houston.

Photo courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center,
Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

The city of Houston has no frontier-town history like San Antonio, El Paso, Tucson, Dodge City, or Laramie—it was born a city while the dust was settling from Texas' war for independence from Mexico. Impresarios Stephen F. Austin and John Austin conveyed land grants to immigrants they had solicited to settle in Texas, making it clear that “no frontiersman who has no other occupation than that of hunter . . . no drunkard, no gambler, no profane swearer, no idler” was welcomed.¹ Eliminating miscreants, at least the obvious ones, helped insure a relatively sophisticated attitude among these settlers. In fact, one would have thought an early Texian might have had an old, patched-up tuxedo packed in his trunk. The Austins gave one of the earliest land grants to Augustus C. and John K. Allen, who arrived in Texas with ambitions to develop their land along Buffalo Bayou into a city worthy of becoming the new republic’s capital. Local politicos vied for Houston to become the capital of Texas in order to display a measure of respectability and culture.² To that end, the community needed an opera house that provided cultural entertainment.

The first respondent to bring live theatre to Houston was an experienced showman from New Orleans, G. L. Lyons. He announced his intention to organize a troupe of performers in New Orleans and move it to Houston. As he told Houston’s newspaper, *Telegraph and Texas Register*, he wanted to build a “dramatic temple” in the new city. Unfortunately, on March 28, 1837, during the troupe’s journey across the Gulf of Mexico, a storm overturned their boat, leaving only two surviving

performers.³ The following year, John Carlos announced that he had acquired a building in Houston at Main and Franklin Streets, which he intended to remodel as a theatre “in a neat and handsome style.” He arranged for a “respectful theatrical corps” to come to Houston from the Saint Charles Theatre in New Orleans that was managed by Henri Corri. Once they arrived, however, a conflict developed between the two, and Corri, who had bankrolled the entire enterprise, refused to turn its operation over to Carlos. Instead, he openly declared that, “It would be the greatest pleasure of my life to say in after years that I have been the founder of the legitimate drama in the Glorious Republic of Texas.” Corri’s public snubbing of Carlos created a distinct problem since Corri had the only troupe in town, but Carlos had the only theatre. Reluctantly, the two formed an unsteady relationship that managed to produce just one evening’s entertainment.⁴

It was customary in those days to run two shows a night. On June 11, 1838, in their only production, the company performed Sheridan Knowles’s *The Hunchback* followed by the *Dumb Belle*. The reviews were ecstatic, and the *Telegraph* gushed, “The theatre in this city was opened on Monday evening last. The house was crowded to overflowing, and many citizens were compelled to wait on the outside. . . . the actors have exceeded the expectation of their most sanguine friends.”⁵

Despite this success, Corri and Carlos went their separate ways. Carlos went bankrupt, while Corri established the first true theatre in Texas, the Houston Theatre. It opened February 25, 1839, and continued for several years; but when the capital of the republic moved to Austin, attendance fell so low that Corri was eventually forced into bankruptcy as well. By mid-1843, he returned to New Orleans.⁶

Local entertainment remained somewhat mundane until February 16, 1860, when the *Telegraph* announced that Captain E. S. Perkins planned to build a new venue on the corner of Franklin and Main Streets. Named Perkins Hall, it would serve the city for the next thirty years. The theatre, “the first great playhouse in Houston,” hosted such performers as Maurice Barrymore (father of John, Ethyl, and Lionel) and Buffalo Bill Cody. Later, Eugene Pillot purchased Perkins Hall, which had become so outdated that many performers refused to appear there. The theatre had succumbed to an illness that one performer diagnosed as “the disease of empty benches.”⁷

In 1879, Pillot announced that he would renovate the building and add new innovations such as electric lights and a telephone that would allow patrons to make reservations. Perkins Hall closed on April 14, 1886, and on May 3, caught fire from the adjacent venue, New Variety Theatre. Within half an hour both theatres were consumed in the blaze.⁸ This incident left Gray’s Hall as the lone venue in Houston. However, the building never suited the needs of a theatre, a shortcoming that inspired owners, J. J. Sweeney and E. L. Coombs, to tear down Gray’s Hall and build a new facility, which they appropriately named Sweeny & Coombs Opera House. A series of ownership changes, renovations, destructions, and new buildings ensued. Sweeny & Coombs became the Houston Theatre, but it too was destroyed by fire. Winnie Davis Auditorium followed, which twice hosted the Metropolitan Opera’s production of Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, and went on to serve Houston for the next forty-two years.

During the mid-nineteenth century, America’s gift to the arts



Houston's Little Theatre, at 701 Chelsea in 1931.

Photo courtesy of Story Sloane's Gallery, Houston, Texas.

emerged in New York City—the Broadway musical. William Wheatly owned a theatre with the city's most well-equipped stage and held the rights to a melodrama, *The Black Crook*, but he had no performers. Henry C. Jarrett and Harry Palmer owned a company of performers and stage sets, but before their opening night, a fire destroyed the theatre they had booked. Unlike Corri and Carlos, these three met and agreed to open *The Black Crook* on September 12, 1866. In spite of one critic calling it “a five and one half hour bottom-numbing show,” it became a hit. According to critics, dazzling special effects and scores of “scantly dressed women” overcame its maudlin themes and sappy lyrics. The show ran for over a year and grossed more than a million dollars.⁹

For the rest of the country, the birth of the Broadway musical profoundly impacted the physical integrity of many theatres because most stages were not equipped to present such a show. In Houston, theatres with stages that met these requirements still shared their facilities with other programs. This severely limited the number of days any show could run and, in turn, had a direct effect on the show’s costs versus profits. Some of the major venues caught in this dilemma following the demise of Pillot’s Opera House included the City Hall Opera House, Sweeney & Coombs Opera House, Winnie Davie Auditorium, and the City Auditorium.¹⁰ On June 21, 1913, the newly organized Houston Symphony Orchestra held its premier concert at the Majestic Theatre. The Symphony, forced to squeeze in between two other shows, had no choice but to perform at 5:00 p.m. Further complicating scheduling, that day marked the end of the season because, as Houstonians will readily acknowledge, in the days before air conditioning “no attraction was strong enough to pull people into a windowless theatre in July and August.”¹¹

In addition to staging problems, when well-known artists

came to town, the city lacked a theatre with adequate seating. In 1920, the City Auditorium presented Enrico Caruso, a sell-out show that left many Houstonians without a chance to hear the legendary tenor. In an effort to appease the loyal fans, management ordered all of the doors and windows opened so that the “evening air would be filled with the voice of the most revered tenor of the day, heard by hundreds of people on the sidewalk outside the auditorium.”¹²

In 1929, during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration program brought a twenty-three-year-old woman named Margo Jones to Houston from Livingston, Texas. She had a master’s degree from the College of Industrial Arts and Sciences (later Texas Women’s University) and had studied theatre in California, Asia, and Europe. Jones became the assistant director of the Houston Little Theatre, a humble venue that was first housed in a “newly cleaned-up city incinerator building.” By 1935, Jones had turned this bag of lemons into a lemon pie by successfully reviving the ancient Greek and Roman concept of theatre-in-the-round that eliminated the costs of curtains and scenery. When Jones moved her productions from the incinerator to the air-conditioned lounge of the Lamar Hotel, audiences were probably very thankful. Her first production was *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The intimacy of in-the-round theatre caused an unexpected reaction from a member of the audience during its first production: “In one scene, Mary Alice Krahel asked Joe Finklestein to bring her an ashtray from across the set. Carried away, a man on the front row picked up the nearest ashtray and handed it to her.” Many were unaware that six of the nine actors donated a dollar to finance the production.¹³

In 1926, Houston was selected to host the 1928 Democratic National Convention even though it lacked a hall large enough



Theatre Under The Stars presented Rodgers' and Hammerstein's classic World War II story, *South Pacific*, which is considered one of the greatest musicals of all time.

Photo by Peter Coombs.

to hold the thousands of conventioneers. The city chose a piece of land along the Buffalo Bayou and, in sixty-four days, built a hall large enough to hold 20,000 people. Renamed Sam Houston Hall, it was never designed as a venue for theatre. The city razed the edifice in 1936, and a year later, it completed construction of the Music Hall and Sam Houston Coliseum on the same site.

The exterior of the Music Hall was not particularly attractive, but its acoustics were good, and it seated 3,000 people. It became Houston's premier venue for over thirty years as the home of the Houston Symphony, the Houston Ballet, and Broadway musicals. It hosted a run of musicals and dramas that brought in such renowned performers as Alfred Lunt, Helen Hayes, Ethyl Barrymore, Angela Lansbury, Katherine Hepburn, Igor Stravinsky, Marlene Dietrich, Richard Tucker, and scores of other legends.

Next door, the Sam Houston Coliseum began as the rodeo and convention center venue with a seating capacity of 9,217 (plus several hundred on the floor). The largest facility in town, it became the preferred venue for rock bands during the 1960s and 1970s, hosting The Who, Jimi Hendrix, Procol Harum, The

Doors, Jethro Tull, and The Beatles. Traveling shows such as the Ice Capades and Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus played there as well. Eventually, bad acoustics and the large number of seats with obstructed views caused shows to relocate to the newly built Astrodome and the Summit.¹⁴

Much of Houston's future was molded, not by political officials, but by a group of civic leaders known as the "Suite 8F Club" who met regularly in that suite of the Lamar Hotel. The group consisted of Jesse H. Jones, Gus Wortham, William Hobby, Oveta Culp Hobby, and others. They established foundations to support the performing arts in separate venues, thereby eliminating the custom of shared stages that stymied the cultural growth of the city. In 1956, Jones commiserated over the idea that Houston needed a first class venue. By 1963, the City Auditorium had been demolished and construction of the Jesse H. Jones Hall for the Performing Arts begun; it opened in 1966.¹⁵ It was, and is, a dazzling auditorium capable of hosting any production. The Alley, a Houston production company that debuted in 1947, opened the doors to its new downtown facility two years later.¹⁶



Theatre Under The Stars produced *Meet Me in Saint Louis*, a romantic musical about a family living in St. Louis on the eve of the 1904 World's Fair.

Photo by Bruce Bennett.

The move to separate venues for individual genres of performing arts continued with the opening of the Wortham Center in 1987. Although Gus Wortham passed away in 1976, his foundation donated \$20 million of the \$66 million cost of the theatre; the balance included contributions from 2,200 individuals who gave \$100 or less. The Wortham currently houses the Houston Ballet and Houston Grand Opera. The first major opera house built in the United States in twenty-five years, the Wortham gave Houstonians much needed jobs and morale-lifting entertainment at the height of the oil bust when the city's economy was in a serious recession. It was, in effect, a restatement of the city's "can-do" attitude.¹⁷ These theatres constituted Houston's downtown entertainment complex, but the Music Hall was in disrepair and in need of attention.

In the meantime, a young man from Pasadena, Texas, Frank M. Young, was waiting in the wings of Houston's theatre scene. At age seven or eight years old, he took part in a children's program at his church in which each child had a few lines to say. As he related later, "we sang two or three things and the entire church erupted and stood up screaming and hollering. That's the first high I ever experienced."¹⁸ That "high" lay dormant only to emerge years later.

Young graduated from high school in Pasadena in 1958, attended the University of Texas and the University of Houston, and then transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) intending to become a psychiatrist. During his senior year at UCLA, he auditioned for a production of George M. Cohan's musical, *45 Minutes From Broadway*, scheduled to be a well-paid, three-month tour that included travel to Hawaii, Korea, and Japan. He got the part over his classmate, George Tekai, who later became famous as "Sulu" in the original television series, *Star Trek*. Ironically, it was Young's only tour as a performer, but it awakened the dormant "high" he had experienced as a youngster in the church program, and it never slumbered again.¹⁹

When he returned to Houston, Young began a series of jobs

with the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Those experiences raised his confidence enough to accept an offer to produce a musical at the new Miller Outdoor Theatre facility. He chose *Bells Are Ringing*, gathered a troupe of performers who agreed to work without pay, and opened the show on September 15, 1968, with a budget of \$4,400. The review in the *Houston Chronicle* called it a "Sparkling Presentation," while the *Houston Post* headlined their review as "Almost Too Good." Shortly thereafter, Young organized Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS).²⁰ Since then, TUTS and Miller Outdoor Theatre have become legendary partners in Houston's theatre culture.

In 1972, TUTS moved its home to the Music Hall where Young continued bringing in top shows. However, the facility's age, regional population growth, and expanded productions made the Music Hall unsuitable for modern theatre. Among other complaints, the roof leaked, forcing audience members to wear garbage bags during the performance.²¹ According to Allen Becker of PACE Management and Broadway Across America, "the Music Hall was a dump. You couldn't even buy a ticket that was dry if it rained."²² In addition, the building had an innate problem—only a single brick wall separated the Coliseum from the Music Hall. While that was sufficient for the shows of an earlier era, it was sadly inefficient for keeping out sounds of modern concerts with enhanced sound systems in the Coliseum from being heard in the Music Hall. This reality embarrassingly manifested itself during a drama featuring the late Katherine Hepburn. With a rock band playing in the Coliseum audible in the Music Hall, Hepburn stopped the performance and told the audience that they needed to complain to the proper officials; she also announced that she would never play in Houston again.²³

In addition to the Music Hall's physical condition, its limited facilities restricted the type and number of shows that could be presented. The only alternative required crews making severe physical modifications to the structure of the stage. Manning Mott, Assistant Technical Director of Zilkha Hall at the Hobby



A stunning view of Sarofim Hall from the stage.

Center, revealed that the new Broadway shows would not come to Houston due to the lack of space.²⁴ Frank Young explained that the final straw came when Disney Productions wanted to premier *Lion King* at the Music Hall, but the inadequate stage forced the theatre to turn down the offer. Michael Eisner, CEO of Disney Productions at the time, wrote to Mayor Bob Lanier stating that if Houston wanted to attract the best in musical entertainment, a new building needed to be constructed.²⁵

City leaders lacked a consensus on whether to remodel the Music Hall or build a new theatre. Finally Mark Shapiro, chairman of Texas Commerce Bank, called the interested parties together, and after lengthy negotiations, they determined a new venue offered a more practical solution. The remaining challenge was raising the funds.²⁶ Keeping with the family tradition of giving back to the community, former Texas Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby agreed to donate \$12 million dollars toward the new facility, generosity that was recognized by naming the venue Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. (Ironically, on departing the meeting in which he agreed to

the substantial donation, Hobby still had to pay four dollars for his parking.) The remaining funds came from scores of other individuals and entities such as El Paso Corporation, The Brown Foundation, The Wortham Foundation, Selim Zilkha, Houston Endowment, and Fayed Sarofim & Company.²⁷

In order to continue its productions during the period between demolition of the Music Hall and erection of the Hobby Center, TUTS faced significant expenses. To meet these needs, it established the *Bridge to the Stars* fund through which contributors could donate the sustaining capital. Donors included the M. D. Anderson Foundation, BP, Conoco Incorporated, The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts, Burlington Resources, and many individuals.²⁸

Construction of the new theatre began in November 1999 and opened to the public on May 10, 2002. Robert A. M. Stern

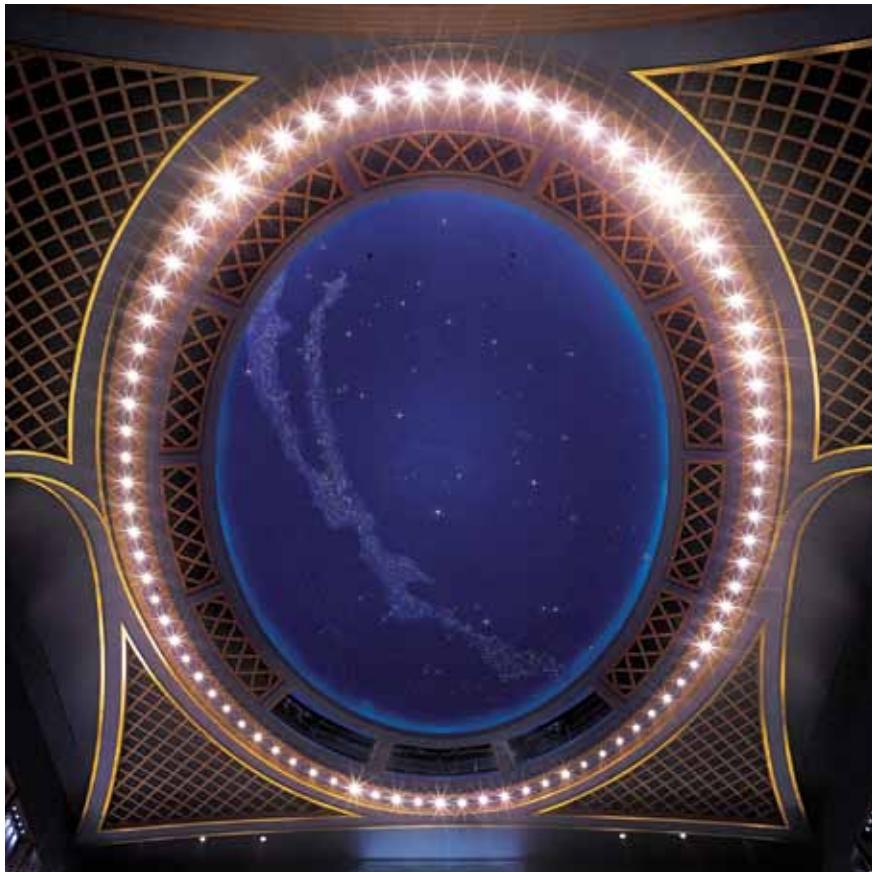
designed the \$92 million facility that finished out as an incomparable venue with two theatres: Sarofim Hall, designed for major productions, which seats 2,650; and Zilkha Hall, intended for use by community groups, which seats 500. Both can accommodate a full orchestra and are equipped with state of the art technology. As a reminder of TUTS' years at Miller Outdoor Theatre, the domed ceiling of Sarofim Hall portrays the night sky with two thousand blinking fiber-optic stars graced from time to time with a shooting star.²⁹

In addition to bringing top rated artists and shows to Houston, the Hobby Center and TUTS engage in projects that tie them to the community. For example, as a symbolic gesture just before hoisting the last steel girder into place, the theatre offered pedestrians in the area an opportunity to sign their names on the beam's surface along with those of the organizers, donors, architects, contractors, and board members. However, the strongest bond between the citizens and the Hobby Center results from TUTS' Humphreys School of Musical Theatre that provides instruction in acting, singing, and dancing to Houstonians as young as four years old, assuring the city generations of home-trained performers.³⁰ Humphreys also has groups that put on small productions and

classes for children in hospitals who would otherwise have to endure limited forms of entertainment.

Admittedly, the road from Corri and Carlos's first theatre production in 1838, to the stunning magnificence of the Hobby Center 172 years later, is long and faded with yellowing pages, photos, ticket stubs, and playbills to trace its path. The past lives on, however; and it has been reported from time to time, as the house lights begin to dim, that an old Texian couple—he, dressed in a patched-up tuxedo, and she in her starched gingham dress—are seen taking their seats among the audience.

Ernesto Valdés has a B.A. from Trinity University, a J.D. from South Texas College of Law, and an M.A. in Public History. He serves as Director for the Oral History Project in the Center for Public History at the University of Houston.



This oval cartouche, commemorating TUTS, dominates the ceiling of Sarofim Hall representing the sky at the annual summer solstice, June 21, as it would appear over Miller Outdoor Theatre. The thousands of lights form the Milky Way, and every five minutes, a shooting star graces the image – assuring the audience that they are still watching theatre under the stars.

Giving as a Hobby: A Family Legacy

by Patricia Pando and Robert Pando

The elegant woman in her eighties looked through the windows of her eighth-floor condominium in Houston's River Oaks. Her views encompassed most of the city and large chunks of her world—downtown and the Medical Center, the University of Houston and Rice, and the headquarters of the *Houston Post* where her formidable powers had held sway.¹

Oveta Culp Hobby had much to remember. From before her marriage to former governor William Pettus Hobby in 1931 at age twenty-six (he was twenty-seven years her senior), she had been a force in the state and city, and later, in the nation. Now, although officially retired, she remained in touch with the world news by way of public affairs programming on C-SPAN and with friends and family by way of the telephone.²

Sometimes the person on the other end of the phone line was Peter Marzio, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts. Hobby, long an art collector, took great pleasure in sharing her collection with the museum and in financing new acquisitions. Many of these conversations focused on her goal of acquiring an important work for the new Cullen Sculpture Garden. She emphasized to Marzio that she was willing to spend, but that she wanted a lot of sculpture value for her dollar. They were successful. In 1988, the Hobby Foundation proudly presented Marino Marini's *The Pilgrim* to the museum.³

Generosity and service were key words in Oveta Hoover Culp Hobby's life and indeed, in the life of her family. She learned it early and in a very real way.

The Hoover and Culp families had roots both in Texas and in public service. Isaac (Ike) Culp, a second-generation Texan, read the law, entered the bar, and served in the Texas legislature, all before he moved to Killeen, Texas, in 1900 to set up a law practice. There, he courted and married Emma Hoover, daughter of one of the town's leading families. Oveta was their second child, born January 19, 1905. Emma had her hands full, as one reporter phrased it, "with having babies and looking after the unfortunate in the town."⁴

When she was six, Oveta learned a real lesson in self-sacrifice. Grandfather Hoover took particular interest in young Oveta Hoover Culp; realizing that he had little time to live, he elicited a promise from his daughter and her husband—when he died they would send Oveta to live with his lonely wife. The young girl moved into her grandmother's house, calling it home until she was about fourteen. "It was not fair

to either one of us," she recalled to Marguerite Johnston Barnes, her friend, employee, and biographer. "*Grandmère* was too old to have to take on a small child. And I was too young to profit as I might have from her upbringing."⁵ Cordelia Hoover was a strict woman and imposed her high standards on the youngster. She treated the child like an adult, and not just any adult—Oveta was a Culp *and* a Hoover; she had responsibilities.

Emma Culp followed her mother in taking those responsibilities seriously. One story that Oveta often told was how, when Oveta was in her early teens, she and her mother assessed the needs of the less well-off of the town, contacted the better-off, and put together an early version of a Community Chest. Years later, the grown Oveta Culp Hobby served on the board of the Houston Community Chest.⁶

The Culp family entered a new world the year Oveta turned fourteen. Ike Culp had thrown his hat into the ring for the Texas House of Representatives and won. He settled his family in Temple, where he established a law practice, and took himself off to Austin.

He did not go alone. In 1919, Oveta said good-bye to her grandmother, mother, brothers, and sisters; good-bye to school; and set out to Austin with her father. There she did not bother to enroll in school; rather, she studied with tutors. Whenever Ike was on the House floor, so was Oveta, picking up "the nuances of politics and law like a prairie hen picking up seeds."⁷

This pleasant, stimulating life came to an end for the father and daughter two years later when Culp lost his bid for election as lieutenant governor. They were back in Temple at the law office and at Temple High School. There, Oveta, a good student, acquired a taste for the stage. She and several other teenagers organized themselves into "The Jolly Entertainers," giving vaudeville-like performances in and near Temple. Typical of Culp/Hoover family behavior, all proceeds went to church organ funds.

In 1922, Ike Hobby regained his seat in the legislature, and father and daughter headed back to Austin. Oveta considered this a permanent move. No longer did she sit on the floor of the House, a docile daughter alongside her father. She became a reporter on the *Austin American-Statesman*, the beginning of a long career in



Oveta Culp Hobby, circa 1935

All photos courtesy of Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas, unless otherwise noted.



Oveta Culp Hobby set an example for her own children's philanthropy. The Hobby family shown from left to right: future lieutenant governor Bill Hobby who donated generously to construction of the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, Jessica Hobby Catto who became an avid conservationist, Oveta Culp Hobby, and former governor William Hobby.

journalism that ended with her at the helm of the *Houston Post*.

In 1925, she went to work in the circulation department of the *Houston Post-Dispatch* and enrolled in the South Texas School of Law. She also became active in both social and civic activities—particularly the League of Women Voters. In January 1928, she became Executive Secretary of the 15,000-Democratic Women's Club based in Houston. When the eyes of the country focused on Houston in June 1928 as the Democratic National Convention convened in the city, the name of Miss



Oveta Culp became the first woman to serve as parliamentarian for a state legislature when she was named to the post for the special session of the 39th Texas Legislature in 1926.

Oveta Culp figured prominently. Although later she declared herself “only a flunkie,” she was a flunkie who organized a rooftop breakfast at the Rice Hotel that included Woodrow Wilson’s widow as well as the governor of Texas, the mayor of Houston, and the convention organizer, Jesse H. Jones.⁹

That fall, following the election of her Houston mayoral candidate, Walter Monteith, she went to work as assistant to the city attorney with the understanding that she would be able to continue to serve as parliamentarian of the Texas House.

The political bug bit again in 1930, and this time it bit Oveta. She declared as a candidate for Houston District 5 in the Texas House of Representatives. For the rest of her life, she told the story of how her opponent, who had Ku Klux Klan ties, tried to smear her reputation by stating in darkest terms that she “was a parliamentarian,” then pausing for the expected gasp of horror. She fielded a spirited campaign but lost nevertheless.¹⁰

Undeterred by defeat, she turned to other campaigns and to the comfort of a romance. Governor Will Hobby, widowed in 1929, had begun a low-key courtship. She later maintained that she did not realize that she was being courted until “Governor,” as she always referred to him, said they should speak with her father. When he told her why, she retorted that he had better ask her first. Both daughter and father assented to the proposal. In February 1931, Oveta resigned as parliamentarian and became Oveta Culp Hobby, as she would be known for the rest of her life.¹¹

The young Mrs. Hobby spent an active decade. In addition to working at the *Post*, she accelerated her public service activities. Late in 1931, she was elected president of the Texas League of Women Voters, a distinction made somewhat unusual by the fact that she was seven months pregnant. Jesse H. Jones appointed her to the Texas Centennial Commission. When a deluge caused serious flooding in Houston and Harris County in 1935, Oveta was appointed to a citizens’ commission charged with the task of solving the recurrent flooding problems; the commission’s work resulted in Houston’s current bayou drainage system.¹²

A natural leader, she headed the Women’s Crusade section of the fundraising campaign for the Community Chest (forerunner of today’s United Way), and then joined the board of directors. Other boards sought her talents: the Houston Symphony, the Houston Art Museum (now the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), the YWCA, and the Houston Recreation Council. The University of Houston, determined to start an endowment fund despite the discouragement of the Depression, selected Oveta as chairman of the women’s division of the drive. In a short time, she became co-chairman of the entire campaign, sharing the position with oil millionaire Hugh Roy Cullen.¹³

Oveta did not pass up opportunities to serve Texas. She chaired the Advisory Committee on Women’s Participation for the 1939 New York World’s Fair, and the Women’s Field Army (later part of the American Cancer Society) named her commanding general for Texas.¹⁴

By now a mother of two, Oveta also worked at her professional development. An early woman member of the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, by the end of the decade she was the group’s president. Nationally, she became the first woman member of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, a distinction made more notable by her entry into a Society dinner meeting at a club restricted to male guests. Oveta at-



Colonel Oveta Hobby and Major William Burgoine at the Pyramids.
Photo courtesy of The National Archives, Still Picture Branch.

tended—but she was barred from the front foyer of the club and strolled in through the kitchen door.¹⁵

Oveta Culp Hobby's name is synonymous with women and World War II. In 1941, while in Washington, D.C., on newspaper business, Oveta got a call for help from the Public Relations Section of the War Department. Letters from women across the country cascaded into the department, asking for information and comfort as to how their recently drafted sons, brothers, and boyfriends were faring. Oveta quickly sized up the situation and suggested specific, workable solutions. Soon, over her initial objections, she began dividing her time between her "dollar-a-year" advisory role in the War Department and her *Post* duties.¹⁶

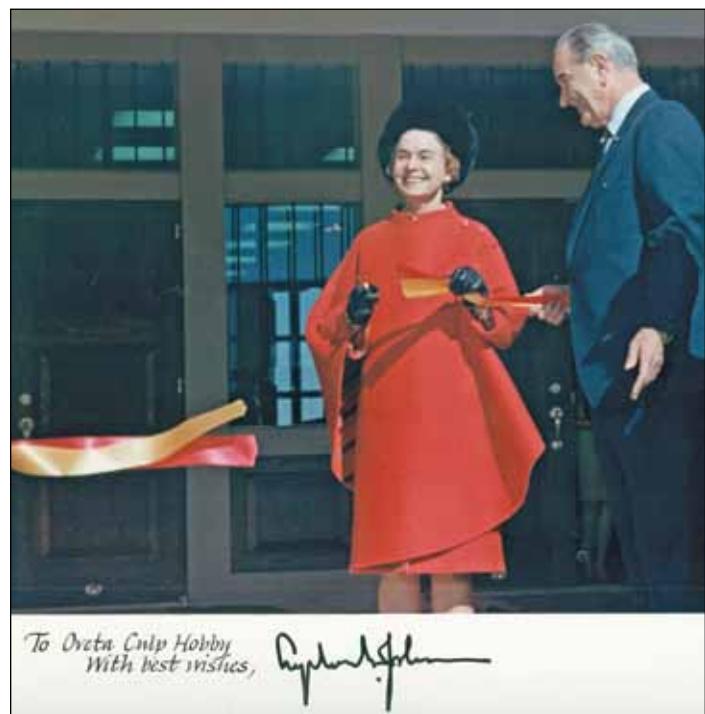
The scale of the impending war forced Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall to include women in the military. He turned to Oveta for a start-up plan for his proposed organization, then drafted her as the director and first member of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, soon shortened to Women's Army Corps, or WAC. Oveta's plan worked amazingly well—within twelve months, 60,000 uniformed, trained WACs were able to perform 406 Army functions previously done by male soldiers. Oveta was not the only Hobby contributing heavily to the war effort. While she was spending the war years largely in Washington, Will Hobby assumed many of her publishing and parenting duties, and her two children were often without their mother.¹⁷

At the end of the war, Oveta Hobby resumed her leadership role in her home city. She joined the coterie of influential Houstonians—the rest were all men—who often met in a suite at Jesse Jones' Lamar Hotel.¹⁸ Oveta was embedded in the city's business structure—when Foley's opened its new flagship store on Main Street in downtown Houston, she gave the keynote address.¹⁹

Oveta's influence during these years was not limited to Houston or to Texas. President Harry S. Truman put Oveta Hobby (never a Truman supporter) on the advisory panel of the Hoover Commission, charged with guiding the reorganization of the federal government. In 1949, she once more raised funds for the American Cancer Society. The following year, General Marshall called his favorite female colonel back to public service—twice. As president of the American Red Cross, he placed Oveta on his fund-raising committee. When Marshall became Secretary of Defense, Oveta became a key advisor on women's issues.²⁰

The National Conference of Christians and Jews, planning for Brotherhood Week in 1951, named Oveta chairman of the newspaper committee. The Houston Chapter of the organization recognized her contribution with a dinner at the Shamrock Hotel, at which Oveta and Will were both praised for their public service and contributions to brotherhood. At about this time, a journalism publication recapitulated her major memberships and honors from nineteen civic, public, and professional organizations; she was an officer or director of almost every one.²¹

In 1953, President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower placed Oveta (a strong supporter) in his cabinet as the first secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). The new department included most of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal social service agencies, together with other agencies that predated the Roosevelt administration. Secretary Hobby assumed control of the Social Security Administration (which served sixty-seven million citizens), the Office of Education, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Public Health Service. Smaller agencies included a mental health hospital, a college and teacher training school for the deaf, a hospital focusing on African American patients, and a printing house for the blind. Although Hobby's politics tended



To Oveta Culp Hobby
With best wishes,
[Handwritten signature]

President Lyndon B. Johnson watches Oveta Culp Hobby cut the ribbon at the Oveta Culp Hobby Memorial Library, Central Texas College, in Killeen, Texas.

to be conservative and Republican, she pledged not to attempt to roll back the social gains of previous administrations.²²

One of the most visible accomplishments of HEW, working in concert with the privately funded National Polio Foundation, was development of vaccines for polio, then the summertime scourge of the U.S. and much of the world. Working rapidly, and working against the summer deadline of the disease, the National Foundation and HEW guided the production and testing of millions of doses of the unproven Salk vaccine and quickly judged it safe. Today, mass vaccinations have eliminated the disease in all but four countries.²³

Hobby stepped down from full-time government service in 1955, but continued to contribute to national affairs. President Lyndon B. Johnson placed her on an advisory board determining the future of Selective Service—the military draft—and on another board planning the future of public television. Soon after, LBJ appointed her to the founding board of directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.²⁴

Back in Houston, Oveta turned her energies to education as Rice Institute's first woman trustee. There, she joined the faction of directors seeking to break the university trust documents barring African American students. Some of the alumni took their opposition to the courts. The trustees won, and Rice joined other private colleges and universities across the South in opening the admissions process to black students. Hobby's interest in higher education spanned many decades. In addition to her service as a Rice trustee, she raised funds for the University of Houston, served on the board of regents of six state colleges, and contributed ideas to institutions as diverse as Harvard University and Clark School for the Deaf. The colleges and universities of the country recognized her contributions with seventeen honorary doctorates.²⁵

When Oveta Hobby returned to civilian life after her WAC service, she plunged back into the daily fray of her pre-war life: newspapering, parenthood, and service. The *Post* was profitable, and growing even more profitable as income grew from the newspaper's radio and television ventures. Oveta and Will began to plan how to share their good fortune. In 1945, they established the Houston Post Foundation (in 1947 it became the Hobby Foundation) with the objective of supporting religious, educational, and charitable organizations.²⁶

True to Oveta's Killeen roots and upbringing, on January 29, 1946, the Foundation made its first donation to the Houston Community Chest. Across the years, the Community Chest (later the United Way) invariably received the first, and almost always the largest, annual donation. While the Foundation gave to many national causes such as the American Red Cross, local groups received the bulk of support. Occasionally, a specific need—the Texas City disaster—precipitated a gift; more often donations went on a regular basis to groups across the area, from small organizations such as the YMCA Colored Branch and Dixie Drive Baptist Church, to the large and well established—the Museum of Fine Arts, the Symphony, the Houston Christian Committee for United Jewish Appeal—and, of course, Rice University. The legacy of this early generosity continues into the twenty-first century.²⁷

At about the time Oveta and Will established their foundation, Oveta started collecting fine art. She had begun collecting things early in life. As a teenager, she collected books—over 750 before she was twenty-one. As a young wife, she became



Marino Marini's sculpture, *The Pilgrim*, which stands in the Cullen Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, was a gift from Hobby.

Photo by Aimee L'Heureux.

a knowledgeable collector of antique silver. Now, she concentrated on "modern art"—twentieth-century paintings and drawings.²⁸

By the late 1950s Hobby had begun donating some of her works to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and subsequently rejoined the board. Her gifts came with no strings attached. She did not quibble if the museum sold artwork not needed for its collection, applying the proceeds to new works. Over time, in addition to many paintings by such masters as Picasso, Renoir, and Matisse, she gave jewelry by Fabergé and Jean Schlumberger, ceramic and stone sculpture, and significant pieces of Steuben and other leaded glass crystal. In all, MFAH counts 100 donations ranging from a cigarette lighter to Marini's *The Pilgrim*, the bronze horse and rider now in place in the Cullen Sculpture Garden and subject of the long conversations with Museum Director Marzio. The conversations and the donations continued. Marzio sought to include works from two missing masters, Joan Miró and Arshile Gorky, among the twentieth century artists in the museum collection. In 1991, with Oveta's final funding, the museum purchased a work of each artist.

On August 16, 1995, at the age of ninety, Oveta Culp Hobby died in her home. Long before, her parents had instilled in her the importance of sharing. She passed down this legacy to her children, her city, and her state.

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Patricia Pando is co-author of *Claiming their Land: Women Homesteaders in Texas* and a contributor to *What Wildness is this: Women Write about the Southwest*. Her Ph.D. in economics is from the University of Houston. They live and write in Houston.

MILLER OUTDOOR THEATRE

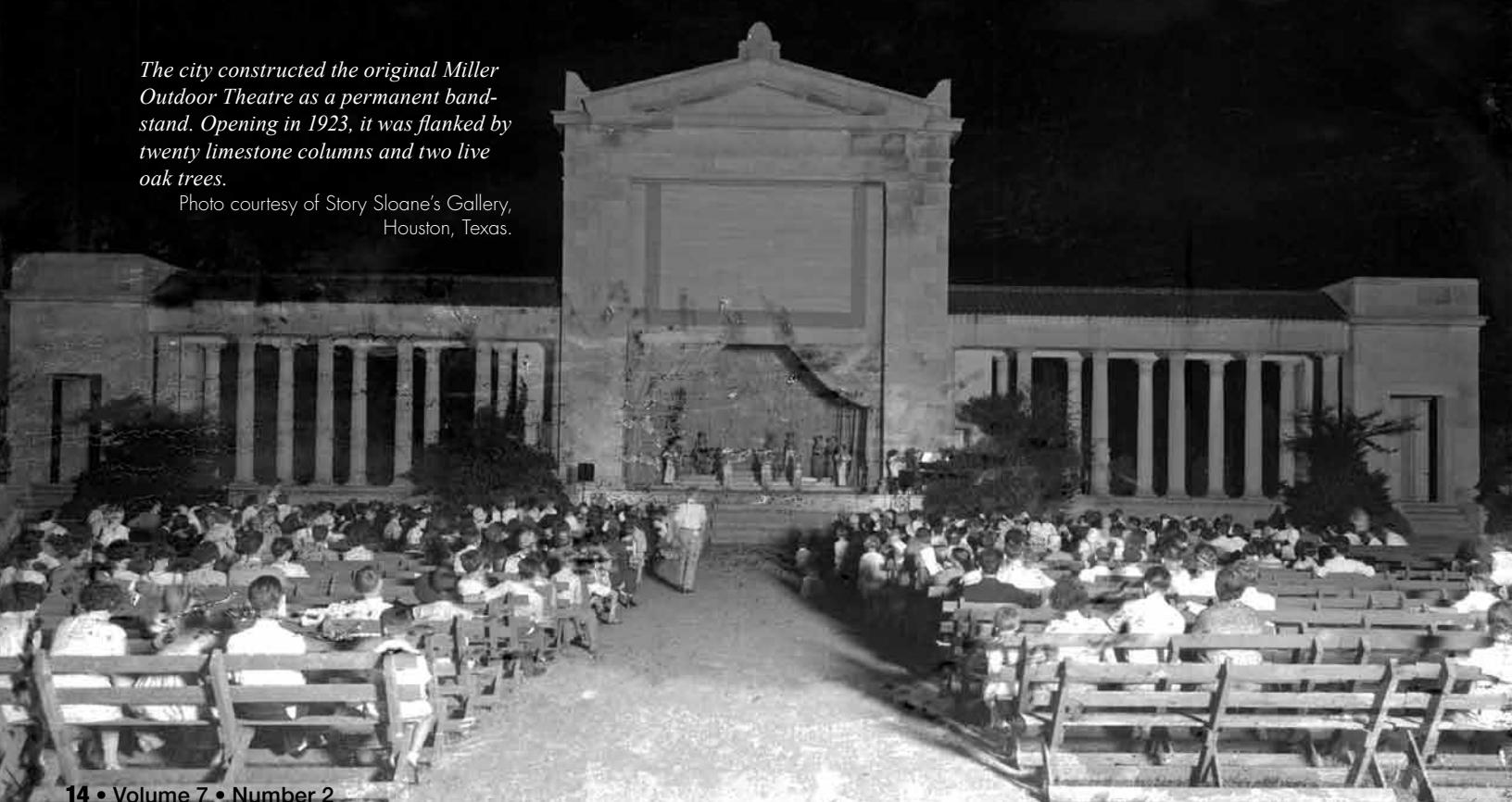
A Uniquely Houston Experience for 87 Years

by Debbie Z. Harwell

Remember rolling down the hill at Miller Outdoor Theatre? Or taking pictures of your children giggling as they rolled down the hill? How about watching fireworks on the Fourth of July? Or spreading out your blanket and picnic in the summer breeze to watch a play under the stars with your special someone? This year marks eighty-seven years since the opening of Miller Outdoor Theatre, and throughout its long history it has stood as one of Houston's most beloved entertainment venues—one that has never gone out of style and never charged admission. In fact, it is the only proscenium theatre of its kind in the country that gives over one hundred public performances a year completely free of charge.

The city constructed the original Miller Outdoor Theatre as a permanent bandstand. Opening in 1923, it was flanked by twenty limestone columns and two live oak trees.

Photo courtesy of Story Sloane's Gallery,
Houston, Texas.



In 1919, cotton broker and mining engineer Jesse Wright Miller bequeathed property to the city “for municipal purposes,” but the city found that the location of the land made using it impractical. The city sold that property to Miller’s sister, Alma Womack, for \$50,000 and then used the funds to build the original theatre as a “permanent bandstand” on the current site in Hermann Park. The original facility designed by William Ward Walkin and built by Tom Tellepsen was a classic Doric proscenium structure with a narrow stage flanked by twenty limestone columns and two live oak trees.¹ Today, the theatre’s original columns form the circular perimeter of the Mecom-Rockwell Colonnade Fountain that sits on the north side of the park, across from the Hotel ZaZa, between Fannin and San Jacinto Streets. The oaks still stand on either side of the theatre, offering visitors a shady respite from the summer heat.



The perimeter of the Mecom-Rockwell Colonnade Fountain is constructed of columns taken from the original Miller Outdoor Theatre.

Miller Memorial Theatre was dedicated on May 12, 1923. The original dedication plaque read, “To the Arts of Music, Poetry, Drama and Oratory, by which the striving spirit of man seeks to interpret the words of God. This theatre of the City of Houston is permanently dedicated.” The ceremonies under the direction of the Recreation and Community Service Department headed by Corine Fonde included representatives “from practically every civic and educational organization in Houston.” The pageant, “Springtime of Our Nation,” involved approximately 2,500 performers and depicted the progress of the United States from its early settlement to westward expansion, and closed with a ceremony honoring those who had died in World War I. Participants included dance school students, Girl and Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, “ward school children,” Rice Institute students, members of the Sons of the American Revolution,

Confederate Veterans, Daughters of the American Revolution, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marines. Later that spring, the theatre hosted its first production, Fredric H. Cowen’s cantata “The Rose Maiden,” conducted by Victor Alessandro, director of city bands.²

The 1920s ushered in the “golden age of sports,” with baseball, boxing and football proving to be extremely popular with the public and profitable for organizers. In a sign of the times before television and sports bars, Miller served as a venue for local sports fans to come and listen to radio broadcasts of the nation’s most contested sporting events, such as the 1925 World Series, which ran from October 7 to October 15. The games were front page news in Houston papers and across the country. The Washington Senators, who had beaten the New York Giants the year before, returned to face the Pittsburgh Pirates. The Senators took game 1, and the Pirates game 2. During game 3 a controversy arose that lasted over fifty years when fielder Sam Rice dove into the right field stands to catch a line drive and did not come up holding the ball for several seconds. The Pirates contested the called out to no avail, and the Senators went on to win that game and game 4. The Pirates took games 5 and 6, which brought the Series down to the final game 7. The atmosphere must have been electric as the Senators jumped to an early lead behind the pitching of future Hall-of-Famer Walter Johnson, and the Pirates pitcher was pulled after just one-third of an inning. The Pirates battled back, however, winning 9-7 and making them the first team in World Series history to come back from a 3-1 deficit.³

On September 22, 1927, the rematch for the World Heavyweight Boxing Championship fight between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney drew 150,000 spectators to Chicago’s Soldier Field. Dempsey had held the title since 1919 and suffered his first defeat against Tunney in 1926. Seventy-four radio stations broadcast the rematch to an estimated fifty million listeners. Cities including Boston, Washington, D.C., and Houston had public broadcasts using amplifiers. An estimated 12,000 to 15,000 people came to Miller to hear the broadcast carried locally by KPRC and billed as “the biggest event in the history of radio.” Announcer Graham McNamee, who was “to radio what Caruso was to grand opera,” provided the blow-by-blow account. In the seventh round Dempsey knocked down Tunney, but when Dempsey refused to go to his corner as the rules required, the referee dealt with the infraction before beginning the count. As a result of the controversial “long count,” Tunney was able to get up before the referee counted to ten. Tunney went on to win the fight in ten rounds. For the thousands at Miller, they had been “present” for the momentous event.⁴

In 1938, the Houston Recreation Department developed weekly programming for civic and community groups under Fonde’s direction in conjunction with music director Coralee Wood. In 1940, *Houston Post* drama critic Hubert Roussel received a letter from former Chicago resident Lewis Brown that asked why Houston could not have outdoor summer symphony concerts as had become popular in other cities. People all across the Houston area showed their support, and Roussel approached Houston Symphony Society conductor Ernst Hoffman about the possibility. Hoffman explained that, with difficult economic times and looming war news, the symphony could barely cover their regular season schedule. When Roussel reported his findings to his readers, a Houston financier and symphony support-



Cannons added a punch to Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture at the 2009 Fourth of July celebration.

Photo courtesy of Leroy Gibbins.

er, N. D. Naman, donated \$1,000 to cover the cost of a summer concert.⁵

The conductor promptly hired forty-five union musicians and scheduled the concert for August 21, 1941. That day the temperature reached 100°, but Houstonians were not deterred. By 7:00 p.m. roads to the park were clogged with cars, and the crowd reached an estimated 15,000 by the time the concert began. The program included the "March" and "Procession" from *Queen of Sheba* by Charles Gounod, *Wine, Woman, and Song* by Johann Strauss, *Tannhäuser* "Overture" by Richard Wagner, "Dance of the Hours" from *La Gioconda* by Amilcare Ponchielli, the first movement of Franz Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, and *Finlandia* by Jean Sibelius. During the intermission, organizers circulated collection buckets throughout the audience to take a "free-will" offering in support of the performance. They were stunned to collect \$800. Following such a positive response, Symphony Society president Walter Walne pledged continued support of the summer symphony, and a tradition was born. The city became a backer of the Summer Symphony Series in 1943 when it allocated \$5,000 to initiate annual concerts. Two years later it approved a \$10,000 grant for the concerts to be administered by the Parks Department; and in 1948, it began financing the performances in full, eliminating the need for collecting audience donations.⁶

In the post-World War II years, Houston continued its amazing growth. The city's population approached 600,000 and the metropolitan area reached approximately 900,000. Development began on the Texas Medical Center south of Hermann Park, and along with that expansion came the need for wider roads. The city began excavating and widening Fannin Street, and all of that dirt had to go somewhere—hence, the hill at Miller Memorial Theatre. The hill formed a "seating" area, and the incline enabled the audience to have a better view over the heads of those sitting closer to the stage. Throughout the years, an unspoken rule, which continues today, divided the seating—those who bring their lawn chairs on one side and those sitting on the ground, spreading out a blanket, on the other.

As Cissy Segall-Davis, Managing Director of Miller Outdoor Theatre, explains, "Nobody mixes it up because they couldn't see as well." Many people who come would not even consider sitting in the theatre seats, but prefer the hill and the summer breeze. In 2009, the hill was raised six feet, which improved the sightlines and enabled Miller to build a permanent structure into the hill for the sound and lighting control equipment.⁷ Of course, theatre seating is not the hill's only function. For over sixty years, the hill has also served as a favorite playground of children who have rolled or run down the hill at breakneck speeds, squealing and laughing all the way.

In August 1952, Hugo Koehn, the head of the city Parks and Recreation Department, reported that the city had somehow called Miller Memorial Theatre by the wrong name since its inception. Although he was unsure how the mix up had occurred, he assured the citizens that the correct name was Miller Outdoor Theatre.⁸

By the 1960s the city wanted a more modern venue that could accommodate expanded productions. In 1964, voters approved capital improvement bonds for construction of a new Miller Outdoor Theatre. Eugene Werlin and Associates designed the structure that was constructed of Corten steel that rusted to its characteristic redwood color. At sixty feet wide, forty-five feet deep, and twenty-six feet high at the opening, the new stage was now comparable to downtown theatres. To stave off the summer heat for performers, air conditioning could be



The annual Fourth of July celebration is a signature piece of the theatre and a crowd favorite. The Houston Symphony produces the show and the Miller Theatre Advisory Board provides the fireworks.

Photo courtesy of Leroy Gibbins.



The crowds frequently arrive early to grab their favorite spot on the Miller hill.

Photo courtesy of Leroy Gibbins.

forced up through slits in the stage. The facility seated 1,750 with room for 8,000 more on the lawn. Orange plastic seats matching those for patrons were attached upside down on the pitched-roof's ceiling, giving the theatre a rather unique appearance. These were placed there to improve the acoustics and later removed when the sound system was upgraded. Concession stands and restrooms were added, along with a small music library, green room, four dressing rooms, an orchestra pit, and office space. Bright orange and turquoise comedy and tragedy masks designed by Harry Fulcher were installed on the wall above the concession stand. The masks, intended to portray a unification of the traditional themes of theatre with the contemporary architecture, instead created a controversy when a vocal few, who thought the masks were ugly, sent their criticisms to the *Houston Chronicle*. The structure won several awards including: the American Iron and Steel Institute's Biannual Award, the American Institute of Steel Construction's Award for

Excellence, and the James E. Lincoln Arc Welding Foundation Award.⁹

The new theatre opened on Sunday, September 1, 1968, with a performance by seventy-six members of the Houston Symphony conducted by A. Clyde Roller. The *Houston Chronicle* described the scene: "The red molded seats were filled by early comers. Other listeners languished on the pitched greensward . . . some on blankets, hundreds on campchairs. Dogs frolicked, small children wriggled on their blankets, lovers bundled, and the townsfolk of all ages and conditions and phenomena of dress arrived to listen and look." The program included "Overture" from *Russian Easter* by Nikoli Rimsky-Korsakov, *Hora Stacato* by Grigoras Sinicu arranged by Jascha Heifetz, and *Pоловецian Dances* by Alexander Borodin. The popular Houston violinist, Fredell Lack, drew a standing ovation for her performance of Felix Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto in E Minor*. The evening closed with Mayor Louie Welch coming on stage to conduct John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever." The newspaper's review indicated that no amplification of the instruments was necessary and that the sound quality was a "spectacular improvement" over the old theatre.¹⁰

On September 15, 1968, Miller hosted *Bells are Ringing*, the first production of Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS), forging a relationship that has brought quality entertainment to generations of theatre-loving Houstonians. Founded by Frank M. Young, TUTS chose its name to reflect the outdoor venue. The Saturday performance was rained out, but the show went on the next night to rave reviews that compared it to the quality of anything seen on New York stages. In 1972, TUTS' production of *South Pacific* had a twenty-seven-foot lagoon in the orchestra pit with an eighteen-foot waterfall. An estimated crowd of 25,000 attended the show, many sitting on the back side of the hill where they could hear, but not see, the performance. Although TUTS began doing indoor performances that year, and has now moved to the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, it contin-



The bright orange and turquoise comedy and tragedy masks, a traditional symbol of theatre, ignited controversy among local residents when they were installed on the new structure that opened in 1968.

Photo courtesy of Industrial Photography of Houston.



The Theatre celebrated Houston's Hispanic heritage with an Ambassadors International Ballet Folklorico program showcasing the beauty and traditions of Mexico with lively mariachi music and colorful folk dance performances.

Photo courtesy of Barrera Photography.



Today many programs at Miller are intended to educate as well as entertain. The Houston Symphony's instrument "petting zoo" gives children the opportunity to try out the instruments first-hand—no doubt inspiring many budding musicians.

Photo courtesy of Houston Symphony.

ues to offer performances at Miller every summer. TUTS holds the all-time record for attendance at the outdoor theatre with 91,000 coming to see its ten performances of *Grease* in 1999.¹¹

The annual Shakespeare Festival became another long-standing tradition. Conceived by Sidney Berger, former director of the University of Houston's School of Theatre, the Houston Shakespeare Festival opened at Miller on August 13, 1975, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming*

of the Shrew—the first spoken dramatic presentations at the theatre. The attendance exceeded expectations and continued to grow in successive seasons. In 2009, the Festival included five performances of *Twelfth Night* and four of *Pericles*, with one performance of each show being captioned for the hearing impaired (something Miller does for many of its performances throughout the season).¹²

Two sculptures were added to the theatre grounds in the 1970s. *Atropos Key* sits at the top of Miller hill. According to Greek mythology, Atropos and her sisters Clothos and Lachesis controlled human destiny. Created by Hanna Stewart, the sculpture is a polished, tool-surface, cast bronze piece mounted on a concrete base covered with black slate. Patricia S. Woodard donated it to the city on August 24, 1972. Outside the stage door stands a cast bronze statue of a young boy with arms outstretched, holding an empty bowl with a spoon. Created by Houstonian Tracey Gutherie at the request of TUTS guild member Pamela Martens, it depicts the main character in the musical *Oliver!* based on Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist*. In the story, the orphaned Oliver goes to the workhouse master, on behalf of a group of hungry boys, and utters the now-famous line, "Please, sir, I want some more." In keeping with that thought, the statue was dedicated on November 11, 1976, as a "continuing plea to city fathers for support for free shows at Miller Theatre."¹³

Throughout the theatre's history and the many changes in political leadership, the city has been forthcoming with funding. The biggest boost came in 1978 when the city created the Cultural Arts Council of Houston to allocate a small slice of the

city's hotel occupancy taxes for the arts with a specified portion of those funds dedicated to programming at Miller. Segall-Davis explains what that means to the city, "This particular facility is one-of-a-kind. Nobody else in the country offers the type of programming we do at Miller Outdoor Theatre, always presented free of charge. Nobody." She adds that people ask, "How do you do that?" And she replies, "the answer is we have a city that invests in this theatre and wants to make it accessible to everyone, no matter what their financial condition, their social standing, or their cultural background."¹⁴

The Miller Theatre Advisory Board receives the occupancy tax funds that it then grants out to the performing organizations, which have to match those funds with at least fifty percent contributed income and the balance through in-kind services to present the show at no charge to the public. The result is a successful public-private partnership. Some of the production partners this past year included Ambassadors International Ballet Foklorico, Houston Grand Opera, Houston Metropolitan Dance Company, Houston Ballet, Dance of Asian America, Society for the Performing Arts, Houston Institute for Culture,

Ensemble Theatre, Kaminari Taiko of Houston, and Institute for Hispanic Culture. About five years ago, the board began raising additional funds to present national and international attractions to augment the offerings of the local companies. This has included such performances as the Golden Dragon Acrobats from China, the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble from Southern India, African Footprint from South Africa, the Soweto Gospel Choir, JIGU! Thunder Drums of China, LUMA, Cirque Mechanics: Bird House Factory, and many more.¹⁵

Diversity has become a mainstay of Miller programming. Segall-Davis points out, "This place speaks to what Houston is all about." Because of the diversity in programming, spectators from a variety of cultural backgrounds come and enjoy the same show. She said, "They all come together, and they enjoy the same performance. And it may not be one from their particular cultural background, but they understand it, they appreciate it, and they take something away." If the theatre has entertained, enlightened, or educated the audience in some way, then Segall-Davis feels that the Miller Theatre Advisory Board has done its job—providing the most diverse, highest-quality series of per-

The 13th Annual Grand Taiko Festival entertained audiences with a Japanese Taiko drumming concert, which included the most powerful drum in America, combined with authentic Japanese classical dancing and aerial artists. Produced by Kaminari Taiko of Houston, Inc.

Photo courtesy of Kaminari Taiko of Houston.



A statue of Oliver Twist stands as a reminder to civic leaders of the importance of continuing to fund Miller Outdoor Theatre.





Young Audiences of Houston presented Kuumba House in “Bana Ba Bapala,” which means “children at play.” The program depicts a typical Saturday for a South African child through work songs, lullabies, children’s songs, and travel songs.

Photo courtesy of Young Audiences of Houston.



formances possible with this most “extraordinary gift” from the city of Houston to its residents and visitors.¹⁶

In 1996, a \$6 million expansion and renovation funded by the City of Houston, Friends of Hermann Park, and the Miller Theatre Advisory Board replaced siding, added restrooms, a concessions facility, office space, and a small stage on the east side of the theatre. Other changes made the facility more accessible to visitors with disabilities. These modifications made it possible to accommodate 6,000 people comfortably, although it is not uncommon to draw thousands more. More recently, adding stops for Metro and the Hermann Park train have made getting to the theatre easier. In the last three years, an additional \$3.9 million in refurbishments and upgrades have further enhanced the audience experience.¹⁷

When people are asked why they come to Miller Outdoor Theatre (besides the fact that it is free), they give a litany of reasons. One woman sitting on the hill responded that she has an autistic child who needs to get up and move around—something that is true for most any child. At Miller children can get up without disturbing anyone, which they could never do in a traditional theatre. A young couple explained that they come for their children to be exposed to the varied performances, which they would not have access to otherwise. A couple with their little picnic table, food, and wine explained that they were simply friends who enjoyed coming to the shows together. Still another couple brought friends visiting from Vietnam to see an opera. Surprisingly, they echoed the same sentiment as another couple from New York, “We don’t get to see anything like this.” Some return because they came to Miller on their first date; others come because their parents brought them to the theatre from the time they were old enough to remember. Whatever their reason for coming, they are experiencing a long-standing Houston tradition.¹⁸

Visit www.milleroutdoortheatre.com for an event schedule.

Debbie Z. Harwell is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Houston and managing editor of *Houston History*.

Cirque Mechanics’ Birdhouse Factory, inspired by Diego Rivera’s Detroit Industry murals, the illustrations of Rube Goldberg, and Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times, creates a factory workshop where the machines are circus props, and the assembly-line workers are acrobats.

Photo courtesy of Miller Outdoor Theatre.



The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble from Southern India transported viewers to the enchanted worlds of magic and spirituality with Odissi, India's oldest classical dance form.

Photo courtesy of Miller Outdoor Theatre.

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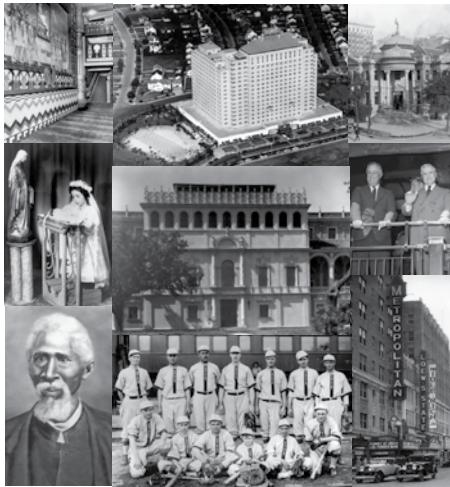
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“It’s art, it’s ballet, it’s dance, and it’s for everyone.”¹

— Lauren Anderson of the Houston Ballet

by Aimee L’Heureux

On December 27, 2006, Lauren Anderson, Houston Ballet’s first African American principal dancer, took her last bow as the Sugar Plum Fairy. She had first seen *The Nutcracker* at age six and immediately knew that she wanted to pursue a career as a ballerina. After begging her parents to let her dance, they enrolled Lauren in the Houston Ballet Academy under the direction of Ben Stevenson. The very next year, at age seven, her dream of performing in *The Nutcracker* came true when she warmed the hearts of audiences in her role as the mouse. For the next sixteen years she danced every female role in *The Nutcracker*, except for Clara, and even performed two male roles as a soldier and a Russian in the trepak.²

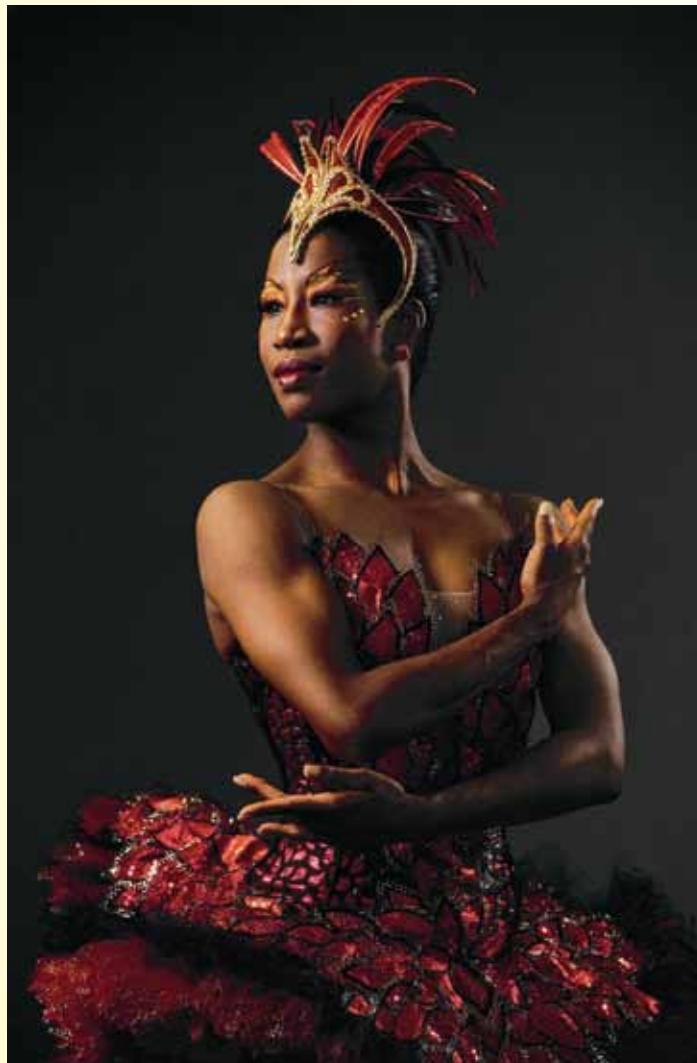
Anderson recalled that her father “worried about how I would cope with the expectations held in a world where, in most cases, white is the usual color for the heroine. And yet, I was never told that I couldn’t succeed—just keep working. He instilled in me a positive attitude . . .” Nearing the end of her training, her father warned her that if she did not find a job by the end of the year, she would have to enroll in college. Ben Stevenson offered her a job with the ballet company just six weeks later. Stevenson has said that, “Lauren works very hard . . . As for being black in a so-called white world, if dancers are good and have what it takes, you believe in them, not their color.”³

Stevenson’s colorblindness was not the only thing that made Anderson, a native Houstonian, a success in the Houston Ballet; she believes that the city’s diversity also enabled her to become Houston Ballet’s first African American principal dancer. “I have had a love affair with Houston audiences since I was seven years old. . . . I think Texans have big hearts.” Anderson danced the role of Alice in *Alice in*

Wonderland, her first lead role in the ballet. Surprised, since Alice is generally depicted as blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and fair complexioned, Lauren proclaimed, “Do I fit this mold? No. There is no mold in art. Ben says, ‘The only color is the paint on the canvas.’ I was like, go Ben! ‘But you had better get that ballet body together if you want to be a ballerina.’” Anderson worked hard to attain her goals by changing her diet and working out, intent on being a successful ballerina.⁴

Anderson, named Houston Ballet’s principal dancer in 1990, broke ground as the only African American principal dancer in any major American classical ballet company at the time.⁵ When, in 1993, Cuban dancer Carlos Acosta joined the Houston Ballet, Anderson remarked that it meant “we had two black people at the center of a ballet stage. That was nice.”⁶ Acosta became Anderson’s regular partner and the two sold out shows almost instantly. They toured the globe performing at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre, the Kremlin Palace, London’s Sadler’s Wells, The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and theatres in Chicago, Manhattan, and Santiago, Chile.⁷ Anderson hopes that her role as a principal ballerina, as well as her time touring, will stimulate change and that ballet around the world will continue to diversify. “I love being black,” Anderson proudly proclaimed. “It is great. I stand out for being different. I’m not just another nameless blonde in the back row. People remember me—and I like that. Being black is a great visual asset.”⁸

Discussing her retirement from Houston Ballet, Anderson stated that, “I’m forty-one and I want to go out on top. I don’t want to drag myself off the stage; I’ve got chapter two of my life to start.”⁹ Chapter two of Anderson’s life began in January 2007 when she



Anderson in costume for *The Firebird*, choreographed by James Kudelka. She currently works for the Houston Ballet’s education department as an outreach associate where she inspires hope for children and encourages them to make their dreams come true.

Photo by Jim Donovan courtesy of the Houston Ballet.

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DANCE
MAGAZINE

**ABT's Picone:
Rushing to
the Top**

**Tango
Burns Up
the Screen**

**Houston's
Hometown
Superstar
Lauren
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The Century of Dance

Lauren Anderson, "Houston's Hometown Superstar," was featured on the cover of Dance Magazine in April 1999.

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assumed her new role with the Houston Ballet's education department as an outreach associate. She teaches ballet classes at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, conducts master classes at area schools, and lectures to students about dance and her historic career—being one of America's most distinguished African American ballerinas.¹⁰

"There is nothing like going into schools and letting kids see how much there is out there and what there is out there. I say, 'I am not here to recruit dancers. . . . I am here to let you know I am you and you are me.' She tells students, "Don't believe the hype that you are only as good as your last show, you are only as good as the last thing you have done." She impresses upon them that Houston offers a lot of opportunity, and whatever they want to accomplish, they can do it here. Anderson believes that her role as outreach associate for the Houston Ballet offers her the chance to contribute to society in a real way. "All I did was dance. I got on stage and did something I loved to do and got a check for it. And Houston let me do that."¹¹ Even though Lauren Anderson has retired from dancing, she remains a star in Houston by giving back to the city that helped make her dream a reality.

Aimee L'Heureux is a master's student in history at the University of Houston and associate editor of *Houston History*.



Houston Ballet's Lauren Anderson and her Cuban partner, Carlos Acosta, reflect the growing diversity of ballet in *Don Quixote* choreographed by Ben Stevenson.

Photo by Jim Caldwell courtesy of the Houston Ballet.



Lauren Anderson dances her legendary role as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, choreographed by Ben Stevenson.

Photo by Geoff Winningham courtesy of the Houston Ballet.

WOMEN STRETCHING THE LIMITS BY STRETCHING THEIR MINDS: 100 YEARS OF THE CHAUTAUQUA STUDY CLUB

by Betty Trapp Chapman



Ima Hogg, left, with two friends on cottage porch at Chautauqua Lake.

Photo courtesy of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Archives.

Miss Hogg and Friends
Her cottage lake Chautauqua New York

At the turn of the twentieth century, Houston was still a little-known southern city of less than 50,000 residents. While progress was being made in the world of commerce and trade, there were few opportunities to explore cultural offerings. Houston had no museums, no symphony orchestra, and no institutions of higher education. Women, especially, were limited in receiving any education beyond a high school diploma, and even that was not attainable for many females. It was inevitable that women with inquisitive minds would seek ways to become better educated. That happened on an October morning in 1909 when a group of women gathered in a room at Houston's First Presbyterian Church to launch a new venture. What they had in mind was an organization in which they could pursue a common interest. They were not focused on gardening or bridge or sewing; nor were they considering the idea of adopting a community service project. These women wanted to learn. Because they were curious about many subjects, they decided to form a

club whose members would stretch their minds and expand their knowledge. Thus the Chautauqua Study Club was born.¹

The local club was an outgrowth of the Chautauqua Movement that was spreading across the United States in the early years of the twentieth century. The first Chautauqua was organized in 1874 by Methodist minister John Heyl Vincent and businessman Lewis Miller at a campsite on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in the state of New York. Two years earlier, Vincent, editor of the *Sunday School Journal*, had begun to train Sunday school teachers in an outdoor summer school format that included study, bonfires, meals, and lodging. Originally named the Chautauqua Lake Sunday School Assembly, the gatherings grew in popularity and broadened almost immediately beyond classes in religious and Biblical study to include a whole range of literary, historical, sociological, and scientific subjects. American presidents—Grant, Garfield, Hayes, McKinley, (Theodore) Roosevelt, and Taft—spoke to huge crowds from



Club members frequented Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

the pavilion on the lake. College presidents, popular authors, Shakespearean actors, leaders of reform, and legendary humorists educated and entertained vast audiences at this new type of American “university.”²²

Vincent, born in Huntsville, Alabama, also believed that Chautauqua was a way to “mitigate sectional antipathies” in the post-Civil War years. Yet the venture was not confined to southern locales. The idea spread to the Midwest where independent Chautauquas were organized, first in Ohio followed by similar ones in Michigan and Iowa. They were soon found in thirty-one states. These Chautauquas, usually built in an attractive semi-rural location near an established town with good rail service, blended vacation with study and entertainment.³

In 1878 the educational experiment took on a new dimension—distance learning. To reach people across the country who could not afford the time or money to attend college, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC) was established. Using a four-year correspondence course, students were encouraged to form reading groups in their local communities and to share the cost of materials as they learned together. At the end of four years of study, students were invited to travel to Chautauqua to receive their certificates in a ceremony. Among those who engaged in the CLSC program were women, teachers, and those who lived in remote rural areas. The CLSC embodied the principal educational beliefs that Vincent cher-

ished throughout his life. He insisted that education never ended until the grave. For those who did not have the opportunity to undertake college or graduate training—an opportunity he had missed himself—he was convinced that a program of guided reading could at least initiate them into a higher level of learning. With this foundation they could advance in a field of their choosing, but more importantly they could provide a home environment for their children where knowledge and educational ambition were respected. In Vincent’s own words, “The CLSC aims to promote habits of reading and study in nature, art, science, and in secular and sacred literature . . . to develop the habit of close, connected persistent thinking.”²⁴ His creation was rooted in a thirst for knowledge.

As these learning forums spread across the country, many new Chautauqua venues were created, giving rise to the Chautauqua Movement. As special agencies became successful at providing speakers and entertainers for these platforms, they began to put together shows that traveled to small towns around the United States. These venues became known as the “circuit” or “tent” Chautauquas since the programs were frequently presented in tents pitched on a field near town. They were sometimes referred to as “culture under canvas.” At the height of its popularity, nearly 8,500 towns were on the “tent Chautauqua” circuit in the United States and Canada. Noted women’s rights advocates such as Susan B. Anthony, Anna Howard Shaw,

and Carrie Chapman Catt made the rounds, but the eloquent William Jennings Bryan was undoubtedly the most visible and active participant with his spellbinding orations on such subjects as suffrage and prohibition. Issues presented by other eminent speakers included the eight-hour work day, slum clearance, free textbooks, national parks, juvenile courts, pure food and drug laws, and direct election of United States senators. By 1880 the Chautauqua platform had established itself as a national forum for open discussion of public issues, international relations, literature, and science. Music, another important component of Chautauqua, was presented through symphonic concerts, marching bands, Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and Cossack choirs.⁵ Thousands flocked to the tents seeking the education, entertainment, culture, and inspiration that had been so widely advertised.

Although there is no record of Houston appearing on the Chautauqua circuit, the institution's programs were known to Houstonians. There is even evidence that some local residents ventured to Chautauqua Lake for the summer activities. The Hogg family had a cottage in the resort setting. It was here that Ima Hogg was introduced to the educational venues.⁶ In 1909 upon her return to Houston after a visit to the New York camp grounds, she brought together acquaintances for the purpose of organizing a local club based on Chautauqua principles.

The first order of business for the fledgling Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle was writing a constitution. The original document stated that the club's objective "shall be the promotion of study, entertainment, and good fellowship." Within four months members revised it to declare that their intent was "the diligent study of the Chautauqua course and to promote intellectual and social entertainment resulting in good fellowship." The by-laws limited membership to thirty women who would meet weekly. Annual dues were three dollars. If a member missed three consecutive meetings without notification, she was removed from the roll. Mrs. Turner Williamson was chosen as president, while Miss Ima Hogg stepped into the role of recording secretary. The other charter members were Misses Ella Cage, Mary Hays, June Percival, Agnes Robinson, and Mesdames Eugene Blake, Lynch Davidson, Thornwall Fay, James P. Gibbs, Herbert Godwin, E. M. Haralson, Vard Hulen, J. C. Hutcheson Jr., William States Jacobs, William Hinds Kirkland, H. H. Lummis, Joseph Mullen, Mabel Franklin Smith, and Nell Lee Van Valkenburgh.⁷

The group considered having a paid leader for its discussions, but ultimately decided that members themselves would direct the studies. They also voted to establish the office of Critic to be the final authority for pronunciation and definitions, although in reality the membership did not relish being corrected. *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* was adopted as the club's final authority in this matter.⁸ Undoubtedly, these new Chautauquan devotees were intent on broadening their horizons. Little did they realize that their quest for learning would continue into the next century.

The eager CLSC embarked on its initial learning adventure by ordering the prescribed materials. Each year the national Chautauqua organization published a list of books, which members anywhere in the country could order and study. The books came with an outline to follow in presenting the information. Supplementary reading was included, as were discussion questions. The materials were intended to provide a complete

study of the selected books. The book list in 1909-10 included *The Greek View of Life and the Homeric Stories: Iliad and Odyssey* by G. Lowes Dickinson, *Social Life at Rome in the Age of Cicero* by William Warde Fowler, and *The Friendly Stars* by Martha Evans Martin.⁹

Since few families had automobiles in 1909, transportation to meetings was not easily available. For this reason the women chose to hold their meetings downtown, which they could reach by riding on one of the city's streetcars. They finally chose to use a room designated for use by women's club meetings in the Carnegie Library that had opened in 1904 at the corner of McKinney Avenue and Travis Street. This arrangement continued for ten years until Mrs. Harris (Louise) Masterson offered her spacious home on Burlington Street in the Westmoreland addition as a permanent meeting place.¹⁰ And, indeed, its doors were open to the Chautauqua Circle for the next twenty-five years.

Chautauqua members repeatedly stated that their organization existed only for the purpose of study. Accordingly, they never adopted a charity or civic cause to champion. That is not to say, however, that individual members were not active in the community in many different ways. The woman suffrage movement was building momentum during the club's early years. Louise Masterson, a staunch suffragist, frequently told of marching down New York City's Fifth Avenue in a suffrage parade. Masterson has been described in club memoirs as having "a brilliant mind and decided views on everything—war, politics, religion, clothes, even smoking for women." These memoirs added that she could have a sharp tongue, as reflected in her comment regarding the new hat of a fellow member: "I see you did not eat your grapefruit at breakfast but saved it to wear to Chautauqua." It appears that the wearer of the Lily Dache hat was not offended, saying that she accepted the remark as "just her way."¹¹

Masterson, longtime president of Houston's YWCA and a founder of the local League of Women Voters, was among the many Chautauquans who contributed their time and talents to the broader community. Ima Hogg, a trained pianist, acted as the catalyst in the formation of the Houston Symphony Orchestra in 1913. She was joined on the symphony's first Board of Directors by Mrs. Mullen, Mrs. Gentry Waldo, and Mrs. J. Lewis Thompson. The club's second president, Mrs. William H. (Mary Porter) Kirkland, was a leader in the Woman's Choral Club, which avidly promoted musical venues by bringing in visiting artists and sponsoring locally produced



Louise Masterson, an avid civic worker in Houston for many years.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

performances. Mrs. Henry B. (Florence) Fall served as president of the Houston Art League during the eight years money was being raised to build The Museum of Fine Arts. Mrs. Henry (Elizabeth) MacGregor, Mrs. Godwin, and Mrs. Waldo were charter members of the Public School Art League, the museum's forerunner. One of the city's legendary civic workers was Mrs. Walter B. (Estelle) Sharp, a founder of United Charities in Houston, which later became the United Way.

Mrs. Edgar Odell (Mary) Lovett was instrumental in organizing the city's

Social Service Bureau, which combined the efforts of different agencies offering social services. As a founder of the Houston Settlement Association (HSA), Mrs. James A. (Alice) Baker worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for residents of Houston's East End. Joining Mrs. Baker as HSA board members were Mesdames Fay, Williamson, Sharp, Mullen, and Thompson.¹² Yet, when these women gathered every week for their Chautauqua studies, all other aspects of life were put aside.

Over the next twenty-five years the club followed the CLSC studies. They explored subjects as varied as "A Study of the U. S. Constitution," "The New Worlds of Islam," and "Mark Twain's America." When they felt additional resources were required they turned to such publications as *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *Atlantic Monthly*, or *Harper's*. Records also indicate that a stimulating radio program called *Information Please* was utilized in their discussions. All parts of the world were studied including Greece, Great Britain, Italy, China, Soviet Russia, Africa, and Central America. In looking at these different areas, club members focused on history, government, art, and literature. Although Chautauquans expressed relief that their studies were more literary than scientific, they did not shy away from science. They tackled chemistry on several occasions, but a study in 1925—"Keeping Up with Science for Unscientific Readers"—probably reflected their true preference in topics. Shortly after women gained the right to vote, a study was conducted on "Women Professional Workers"—an innovative concept for the "New Woman" in America. Yet as they discussed new roles for women, they also looked back at the lives of two queens, Cleopatra of Egypt and Victoria of England. Whatever the subject, the studies were thorough and intense.¹³ After all, their object was to stretch their minds and in doing so to increase their knowledge.



Florence Fall, the club's third president and strong advocate for progressive reforms in Texas.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

While on a trip abroad, Louise Masterson purchased a small bronze replica of Michaelangelo's *David*, which would assume a permanent place at every Chautauqua meeting. As Mrs. Masterson explained to the club, "*David* represents a complete victory. Thus everyone in Chautauqua should make a complete effort and strive for a complete victory when presenting their paper." As a reminder of each woman's obligation to educate and be educated, *David* has occupied a place of honor at all Chautauqua meetings since that time.¹⁴

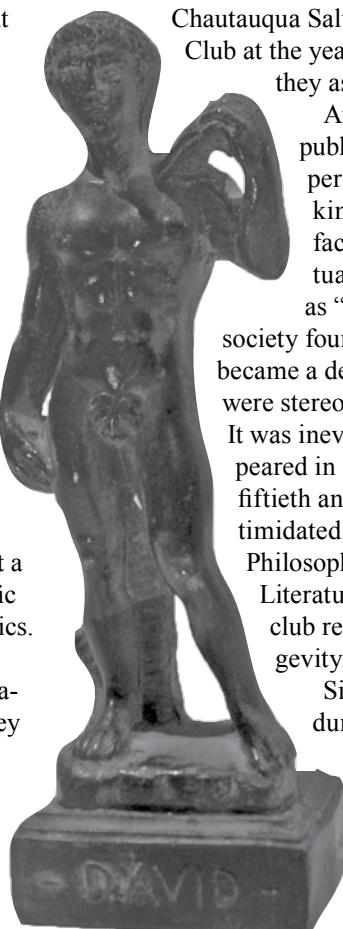
Although club members enjoyed fellowship at their meetings, planned social activities were only incidental to the study courses. There was an exception to this in the early years. The first president, Mrs. Williamson, wanted to reward the members for their hours of serious study. She arranged a Play Day at the end of the year during which the club traveled on the Williamsons' boat down the bayou for a picnic at a member's home. Then they continued by boat to San Jacinto Battleground where they toured the grounds after which they enjoyed tea. Their return trip back up the bayou was by moonlight. This began the tradition of Picnic Day held each year in the spring at Mrs. Bonner's Bayshore home, Mrs. Red's house at Red Bluff, or Mrs. Howard's farm near Baytown. Picnic Day was observed until the 1960s, when it faded away.¹⁵

One tradition that has not faltered is the Chautauqua Salute. In 1909 it was not considered lady-like to applaud a well-done presentation. Instead the members would wave their white handkerchiefs to show their appreciation. This practice had been used at Chautauqua Lake assemblies when speakers delivered excellent speeches. Instead of receiving thunderous applause, the speaker would be greeted by a sea of waving kerchiefs that resembled a snowstorm. Today—one hundred years later—the

Chautauqua Salute is still used by the Chautauqua Study Club at the year's last meeting to "wave in" new officers as they assume their duties.¹⁶

At a time when women's clubs often received publicity in the society section of local newspapers, Chautauquans shunned publicity of any kind. This attitude may have been due to the fact that women who organized for intellectual purposes were often jestingly referred to as "bluestockings"—this alludes to a literary society founded in the late eighteenth century, but it became a derogatory term for educated women who were stereotyped as wearing woolen worsted stockings. It was inevitable, however, that the club sometimes appeared in local newspapers. Not long before the club's fiftieth anniversary, this appeared: "No subject intimidated the ladies of the Chautauqua Study Club—Philosophy, Physiology, American History, German Literature—they conquered them all!"¹⁷ When the club reached significant anniversaries in their longevity, they were more receptive to publicity.

Since the records of the club are abbreviated during its early years, there are no detailed



Michaelangelo's *David*, present at every meeting of the Houston Chautauqua Study Club for over seventy-five years, inspires the women to make a "complete effort" as they strive for knowledge.

Photo courtesy of Joan Eidman.



Chautauqua Study Club members in October 2009 at 100th anniversary celebration.

Photo by Miro Dvorscak.

accounts of their meetings. We might assume, however, that a meeting of the Houston Chautauqua Circle was similar to a fictionalized meeting written by novelist Zona Gale for *Harper's* magazine in August 1928. In Gale's sketch, the CLSC has gathered during the evening at a member's home. The circle is operating on its own resources—no local doctor to give guidance on chemical experiments, no apparent access to a microscope or telescope, and no William Jennings Bryan to lend prestige to the occasion. The group is devoting itself to "The Preparatory Latin Course in English." Although the study materials are lofty in nature and incomprehensible at times to the women in attendance, Gale succeeds in telling her readers that there is a glimmer of light within the circle. These students understand that "the knowledge that knowledge exists can be the beginning of knowledge, and can come as a revelation." The article proves that the Houston Chautauquans were not alone in their quest for knowledge. They were part of a vast network. By 1940 the CLSC had reached a membership of three quarters of a million. Members and circles spanned not only the United States, but also the continents and sub-continents from Labrador to Argentina, from Puerto Rico to Ceylon, from Russia to Korea.¹⁸ The Chautauqua Movement was a truly world-wide one.

In the late 1930s, club members began to supplement the Chautauqua curriculum with other materials. In 1939 studies of Ernest Trattner's *Architect of Ideas* and William Lyon Phelps's *Autobiography of Letters* were accompanied by reading *Maude* by Alfred Lord Tennyson and *Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy. In addition to prescribed discussion questions, club members frequently related the subject to their own surroundings, as in exploring the teaching curriculum in their local schools. The third study in 1939 was *The Good Neighbors*, a study of Latin America by Delia Goetz and Varian Fry. A question on which the club deliberated was: "Should the United States maintain a Navy large enough to defend the Western Hemisphere?"¹⁹ There is no record of the club's conclusion, but this subject became especially relevant in our nation in just two years.

With the advent of World War II in the midst of a rapidly changing world, the Houston club finally severed ties with the national Chautauqua organization, and members began to develop their own programs, frequently using courses provided by universities. In 1944 the club adopted a format in which a committee selected an overall theme for a year, or a portion of that year. Members then presented papers on an assigned subject

relating to the theme. They chose India as the subject for that first year. In reality, the group's departure from the Chautauqua format reflected what was happening in the rest of the country. By the 1940s the Chautauqua movement had become only a shadow of itself. The institution had reached its peak in 1924, the movement's Golden Jubilee year. At that time, twelve thousand towns participated in the country-wide circuit, reaching thirty-five million people.²⁰ But life was changing in small town America. More people had automobiles, enabling them to travel to attractions. Improved communication made radios and movies readily available. Newspapers and magazines were proliferating at a rapid pace. In short, Americans no longer depended on the Chautauqua circuit to entertain and inform them. Most of the tents folded, never to bring the excitement of Chautauqua to the countryside of America again. The Chautauqua Institution, although diminished, continued to offer programming just as it does today.²¹

And what of the Chautauqua Study Club a century after its organization? Its procedures have changed little over those years. The club continues to meet regularly for the presentation of papers on subjects assigned by the planning committee for that year. Little business is ever discussed. The meeting is devoted entirely to the club's purpose—study. Fellowship is enjoyed over lunch following a discussion of the papers. Membership is limited to twenty-eight women to correlate with the twenty-eight papers presented each year. When there is a vacancy on the roll, interested individuals apply for membership.

Although much has changed in the lives of women since 1909, one thing is still constant for those who belong to Chautauqua today: they are eager to stretch their minds and learn new things. They enjoy researching subjects they may know little about and then sharing their findings with fellow students. As Rev. Vincent wrote all those years ago, "It is Chautauqua's genius to allow that every man has the right to be all that he can be."²² The Chautauqua Study Club member might alter that statement to declare that "every woman has the right to learn all that she can." After all, that was the club's goal one hundred years ago and so it remains today.

Betty Trapp Chapman is a historian who researches, writes, and lectures on Houston history. Although she delves into all aspects of local history, her special areas of interest are women's history and historic preservation. She currently chairs the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission.

THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS MUSEUM: ONE MAN'S PASSION CREATES A LEGACY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS

by Joe Skeen



Artifacts in the museum include a display case containing firearms used by Buffalo Soldiers from all eras, an overcoat made from the hide of a bison, a taxidermy bison head, and a McClellan saddle of the type used on the western frontier.

Photos courtesy of author unless otherwise noted.

The gateway to the Museum District in Houston is not as recognizable as, say, the Gateway Arch in St. Louis—which prides itself as the “gateway to the West.” Nevertheless, the district’s gateway represents just as important a piece of history as Missouri’s most notable landmark. The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum is an excellent place to start a day or weekend touring the many museums that Houston has to offer. It is a place where the Buffalo Soldiers of the United States—both present and past—can call home; and where visitors can hear Captain Paul Matthews, the museum’s founder and one of its dedicated tour guides, tell the soldiers’ stories. Equally fascinating is the story of how it all started for Capt. Matthews and where the museum is headed in the future.

The Buffalo Soldiers began as segregated units in the western part of the United States in 1866. These soldiers stood apart from the first African American unit formed during the Civil War, the Massachusetts 54th Infantry Regiment, and were direct descendants of the first all-black regiment in the American

Revolution, the 1st Rhode Islanders.¹ The Buffalo Soldiers were the first black troopers garrisoned after the Civil War, and their actions on the western front live on in the halls of this south Houston museum.

The tour of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum starts on the second floor of the museum with a fifteen-minute video that offers a brief history of the soldiers, and which the museum recommends guests see before strolling around on their own. Interpreters are also available as museum guides. After watching the video, visitors proceed downstairs to the main exhibit hall. Some of the display rooms are small, making it difficult to accommodate larger groups, but the quaint space makes the experience all the more enjoyable. Capt. Matthews started our tour, as he does with most guests, with an explanation of the “Preamble to the Buffalo Soldiers.” Frederick Douglass holds a prominent place in the museum as the most important person of the Preamble Period. Matthews pointed to a quote from Douglass: “Once the Black man get upon his person the brass



Shown at the museum's Preamble display which features Frederick Douglass, Captain Paul Matthews explains the origins of the Buffalo Soldiers to museum visitors.

letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States."

The Emancipation Proclamation moved the United States closer to freedom and citizenship for all of those held in bondage, but it had no force in Texas at the time of its issuance in 1863. Capt. Matthews explained that "Section 9 and 10 of the Emancipation Proclamation stated that slaves would be free when federal troops occupied the territory, and that occurred [in Texas] in June of 1865 when Major General Gordon Granger landed in Galveston, read the proclamation, and he had 300 of his black troops enforce the law."² This event was the origin of African Americans' Juneteenth celebration. Once Granger landed in Galveston, emancipation for the African American slaves in Confederate Texas had become a reality and was certainly a cause for celebration.

Scholars have debated the rationale behind Lincoln's proclamation. One theory held that he freed the slaves to incite a slave uprising in an attempt to weaken the Confederacy and hasten

The first four Buffalo Soldiers to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point:

*Lt. Henry O. Flipper, 1877;
Lt. John H. Alexander, 1887;
Lt. Charles Young, 1889; and
Lt. Benjamin O. Davis, 1936.*

the Union victory. However, the proclamation could not be imposed upon the Confederacy, where it would have had its greatest effect, without a mechanism to enforce it.

Word of the proclamation guaranteeing the slaves' freedom reached the South through various methods. Therefore, Capt. Matthews asked, "How did the word get to Texas?" He explained that the two most popular means were the "walking wounded,"

Confederate soldiers that left the battlefield, and "a very well-established communication network." Word of freedom for black slaves did not travel fast, but it did travel as quickly as the Confederate soldiers returning to their homes in the South. This freedom established by the Union government was critical to the formation of the Buffalo Soldiers in 1866.

To tell the full story of the Buffalo Soldiers, the museum identifies the transformation of Africans to African Americans and, ultimately, to Americans. The museum's Transformation Display next to the Preamble area shows visitors exactly how this occurred. Emblematic of the African roots of the soldiers is a display with a family mask and a warrior's mask. Capt.

Matthews explained the steps of transformation as “rites of passage, if you will, from picking cotton, cutting sugar cane, the Underground Railroad, the above ground railroad, the Westward Movement, the Manifest Destiny—all of these that went into making” African Americans in the United States.

Once former slaves legally became Americans by virtue of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, it became apparent that they wanted to serve in the army of their reunited country to honor the sacrifices of those that had set them free. The Buffalo Soldiers emerged in 1866, finally able to serve their country when the United States Army created the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantries as segregated units. The 39th and 40th were stationed primarily in North Carolina and Louisiana, with the 38th and 41st garrisoned in New Mexico and Kansas. As peace-keepers in post-Civil War communities, they earned a reputation as outstanding citizen soldiers. The units were combined in 1869 when the North Carolina units became the 25th Infantry, and the western units made up the 24th.³

At the time of the infantries’ creation, the units were not called Buffalo Soldiers. Capt. Matthews explained that the name was given to them by Cheyenne warriors who “saw two things in the soldiers that they saw in the buffalo: the naturally curly hair, and they were ferocious fighters. They put those two things together, and they came up with Wild Buffalo. The term ‘Wild Buffalo’ eventually became Buffalo Soldiers.” These units existed in some form until 1944, when the Army disbanded them during World War II in North Africa; however, African Americans who serve in the military today are still recognized as Buffalo Soldiers.



Captain Matthews speaks to two museum visitors in front of the modern-day Buffalo Soldiers display, which includes biographies of African American NASA astronauts and a 9th Regiment Flag that accompanied them on board the Space Shuttle.

The museum has a display dedicated to the African American astronauts who traveled into space or were lost in the effort of exploration. When asked why this group is included in the display, Capt. Matthews quickly pointed out that “they are modern day Buffalo Soldiers,” but that is not the only reason. “To be able to get students engaged, you’ve got to bring them from one era to the current era to make it all real. . . . They have

read about astronauts and say ‘How did this relate to the Buffalo Soldiers of 1866?’ Well, they [astronauts] are on the vanguard of civilization. In the 1860s west of the Mississippi . . . you were at the vanguard of civilization. It just wasn’t a place for mankind.” He continued by stating that “the same thing could be said about outer space. These people, astronauts, irrespective of their color, they are on the vanguard of civilization.”

For the most part, the history of the soldiers has been overlooked, but recently Colin Powell, arguably the most famous modern Buffalo Soldier, brought greater attention to the deeds of these early civil rights pioneers. Cherri Washington, newly appointed executive director of the museum, explained how the former secretary of state and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff honored the soldiers. Secretary Powell was on a run at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and “came to a fork in the road, and he saw a ‘10’ just in the road. He stopped, and he said, ‘Wow, this is the only thing at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, home of the 10th Calvary of the Buffalo Soldiers, to let you know that this was [their] home.’” Recognizing the 9th and 10th symbols, he said, “We need to do more.” Powell organized a committee that worked for two years to create a monument to the Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Leavenworth. Washington remembered that Powell never let the public forget the soldiers’ contributions and always gave credit to the Buffalo Soldiers whenever he gave a speech saying, “I got where I am today on the backs of the Buffalo Soldiers.”⁴

Capt. Matthews’ personal journey that led to the founding of the museum began in the 1960s. “I was an ROTC Cadet at Prairie View A&M University, and just by chance, read two paragraphs in one military book about the Buffalo Soldiers. I was just intrigued about these black men in the blue uniforms



Flags of the armed forces are displayed alongside a World War II uniform worn by a female Buffalo Soldier.

and why they were doing what they were doing.” He remembered that “In the 1960s, I made parallels to the 1860s. And so, I was looking for some mentors, some direction. What should I be doing? I was headed off to Vietnam with the commission [officer’s commission in the army] and all the other things that were going on at the time. I looked back at these guys, and they did what they did, not necessarily for themselves but for those that came behind them; and I said, ‘Wow, there is my answer.’” He went on to serve in the military and started collecting the items that are now artifacts in the museum. It grew from there as his family and friends sent him gifts related to military history for holidays and birthdays.

Matthews said he had to give his wife credit because six months to one year before he retired, he told her “you know, I am going to start a museum.” She replied “Honey it’s about time you got some of this stuff out of my house!” Matthews said he took \$40,000 from his retirement, with the wife’s permission, and found the current building. They started with 4’ x 6’ tables, and laid the artifacts on top of them. They lacked formal training as curators, but with a passion and Matthews’ background in the corporate world, the couple developed the exhibits. Once visitors started coming and saw the artifacts, they began bringing more items related to the Buffalo Soldiers. “We were just flooded . . . with uniforms, patches, helmets, rifles. We have about thirty rifles now from all different periods. Back from the Revolutionary War. One [musket] is so old, it crumbled . . . we have at least three from the 1860s, all the way through to the AK47.”

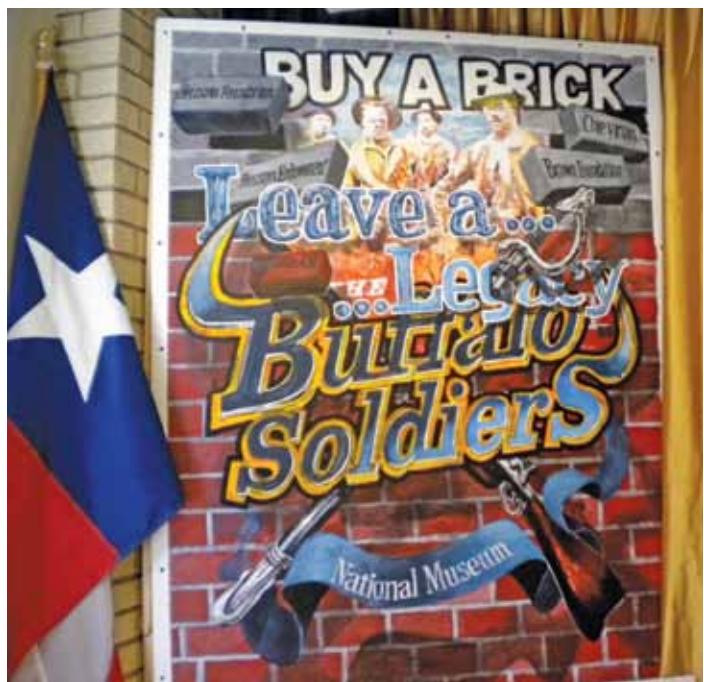
When Captain and Mrs. Matthews began their journey into the past, they owned eighty percent of the artifacts displayed



Pictures and artifacts are on display of Buffalo Soldiers from World War I and World War II. The sign at the top of the display is emblematic of the segregation enforced in the ranks of the armed forces throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

in the museum. Now, thanks to the numerous donations on the part of the museum’s benefactors, the Matthews’ collection makes up only about fifty percent of the total collection. The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum has outgrown its first home, and plans are in place for the museum to move from its quaint home on Southmore Boulevard to a more spacious location in the former Light Infantry Brigade Armory at the intersection of Caroline and Alabama Streets. The three-story brick structure, dating back to 1873, is a good fit for the museum—a historic building within the Museum District. Designed by architect Alfred C. Finn, the armory was built by contractor C. G. Street at a cost of \$150,000. Construction began on January 17, 1925, and the Holland Lodge 1 AF and AM laid and leveled the cornerstone for the building on April 1, 1925. The cornerstone has withstood the weather well, and its inscription remains legible.⁵

Since neither the federal nor the state government provided



The museum’s “Leave a Legacy . . . Buy a Brick” program gives the public an opportunity to contribute to the museum and be remembered in the Soldiers Plaza at the Houston Light Guard Armory. The donor is recognized with a personalized inscription on a brick in the plaza.

Photo by Aimee L’Heureux.

help to build the new armory, in 1925, the Houston Light Guard raised the funds for the building themselves. Some of the funds came from the winnings that the Houston Light Guard drill team accumulated from competitions throughout the region.⁶ Although Capt. Matthews started as the chief curator for the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, since acquiring the former Light Guard armory, he has taken on the task of preserving the guard’s history as well. He recounted how the Light Guard was a “historically white organization” made up of members of “all of the families that had power and influence.” However, when it came to the drill competitions, a black drummer, John Sessums, was one of the major reasons the drill team would win. Capt. Matthews added, “His great-nephew is a member of our organization now. The Light Guard Veteran’s Association has his uniform, they have his drum, and all of those things are going to be donated to the museum. It is just an amazing story.” Thanks in part to Sessums, the first Buffalo Soldier in the Houston Light



A close up view of the entrance at the Houston Light Guard Armory, the future home of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.

Guard, the armory building funds were raised through drill competitions in the 1880s and 1890s, and more than a century later, have given the Buffalo Soldiers Museum the foundation for a new home.

The new museum location will also serve as classrooms and offices for Houston Community College (HCC), which is across Caroline Street from the armory. HCC will have four classrooms in the building and will share the library with the museum. Students from all educational levels will be able to come to the museum to learn about the soldiers or attend college courses in the shadow of history. Capt. Matthews said, "We are also talking with Texas A&M and Prairie View [A&M], because they are military institutions, to work with us in our research library." The museum's goal is to become a place where people can come to learn more about the African American military experience. When the old armory is renovated and the move is complete, this military history will have a home in an armory built with the winnings of a great drill team and thanks to the efforts of a Buffalo Soldier.

The move will not change the focus or the mission that Capt. Mathews originally set before opening the museum to the public in 2001. He and his staff are working to ensure that visitors have the same experience in the new building that they receive in the current museum. He understands that there will be some challenges in a larger facility, but the rewards will remain. "We have the personal touch here. Now, we may lose a little of that when we go to the other museum because it is going to be a much bigger space, but we are always going to maintain our original focus and our original design." Matthews indicated that the museum will explain the artifacts in greater detail, giving each "as much personal attention" as possible. "When we look back before we opened the doors, we said 'What do we want to do?' Our mission, as defined, is to preserve, promote, and perpetuate the honor and legacy of the brave men and women who fought, bled, and died in defense of America, and we want the world to know that."

Today, the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum touches the lives of many. Capt. Mathews stated that the museum has around 40,000 visitors annually and hosts nearly twenty different schools each year. He predicted that the new building might almost triple attendance numbers—estimating that 100,000 people could visit the museum annually in its new home.

Capt. Matthews and his staff also go to schools and functions to tell the soldiers' story. To arrange a visit to the museum or an on-site school visit, write to them at the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, 1834 Southmore Boulevard, Houston, TX 77004, or call 713-942-8920. The museum can be found on the internet at www.buffalosoldiersmuseum.com. Admission fees are five dollars for general admission and three dollars for seniors and students with IDs. The museum is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Whether by visiting the museum, hearing a presentation at a school function, or viewing the website, you will find the story of the Buffalo Soldiers, from 1866 to today, an enriching experience. As Capt. Matthews is fond of saying, "We want to do something that is going to bless others."



Joe Skeen is a native of West Virginia and a master's student in Public History at West Virginia University. He spent a summer in Houston as part of WVU's Public History internship program.

When the Buffalo Soldiers Museum moves to its new location, Capt. Mathews plans to continue the original focus of the museum with a variety of artifacts representing the complete timeline of the soldiers' service.

Photo by Aimee L'Heureux.

Millard's Crossing Historic Village: Lera Thomas' Incredible Gift

by Susie Lower with Ernesto Valdés

A short drive north of Nacogdoches, Texas, on Highway 59, is a history buff's delight—a quiet village made up of eighteenth and early nineteenth century buildings, at least one of which existed when Texas was *Tejas*. Millard's Crossing Historic Village offers visitors, especially parents, a unique opportunity to step into the past with their children and share a sense of early Texas. This village of antiquities has its own story, which begins with Lera Millard Thomas who was born in Nacogdoches, Texas, on August 3, 1900.

She had always been an extremely smart, restless child with high ambitions, as one often-told story illustrates. In her early teens, Lera decided that she wanted a tennis court, which was unheard of in a small East Texas town in those days. When her father summarily dismissed the idea, she engaged one of his hired help to work with her to build one herself, and build it she did. Much of her life is intertwined with that of her husband, Representative Albert J. Thomas, one of Houston's most popular congress-



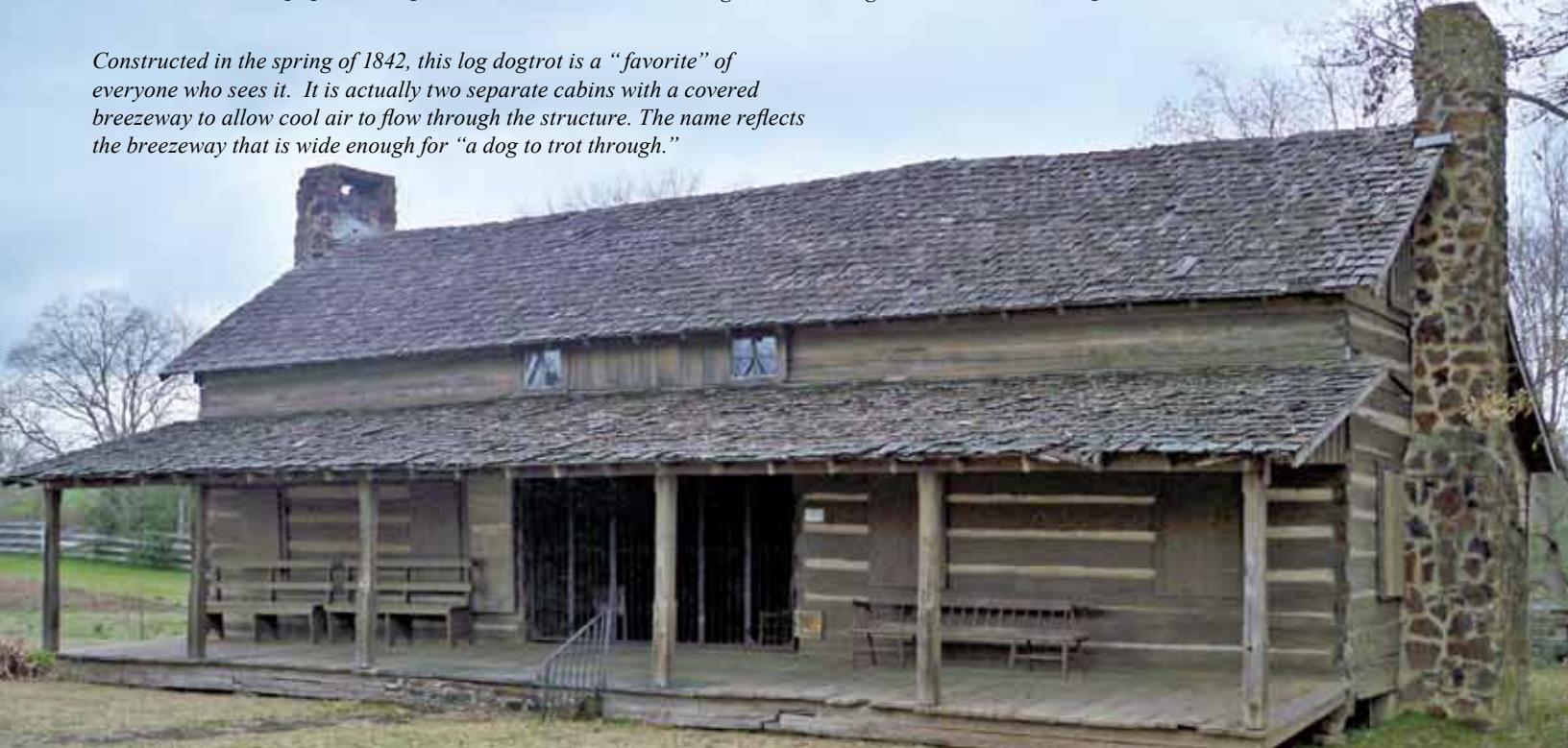
Lera Thomas, a Nacogdoches native, began an amazing preservation project in the "Oldest Town in Texas" when she moved several threatened, antique structures to what is now Millard's Crossing Historic Village.

Constructed in the spring of 1842, this log dogtrot is a "favorite" of everyone who sees it. It is actually two separate cabins with a covered breezeway to allow cool air to flow through the structure. The name reflects the breezeway that is wide enough for "a dog to trot through."

men, who served fourteen consecutive terms in the United States House of Representatives from 1936 until his death in 1966. The Democratic Party leaders asked Lera Thomas to run in the special election to fill the vacancy left by her husband's death; she did and won seventy-four percent of the votes. After serving out her husband's term, she returned to Nacogdoches, where she had inherited some family land, woods, and a cow pasture. It would not be long before the cows had to move over as she embarked upon a remarkable preservation project, relocating cabins and structures that now make up Millard's Crossing Historic Village—her legacy to the people of Texas.

During the years in Washington with her husband she had rubbed elbows with some of the most powerful political leaders of the time. As a congresswoman in her own right, she worked to put her own stamp on legislation during her abbreviated term in office. She was accustomed to "getting things done."

When she returned home to Nacogdoches, she discovered



All photos courtesy of Millard's Crossing Historic Village unless otherwise noted.



"The Watkins Log Cabin," built in 1842, is a "two-pen" square log house with a spacious loft and two "side rooms." Relatives of Thomas' mother, Annie Watkins, lived in the cabin in the late nineteenth century. It was moved to Millard's Crossing Historic Village from northwestern Nacogdoches County.

Photo by Alan Richman.

the slow and steady destruction of many of the town's historical and stately old buildings. Given that the town calls itself the "Oldest Town in Texas," the destruction of its past was an outrage that shocked her. Rapid commercial growth due to the baby boom in the mid-1960s began destroying the gracious old town where she had grown up. In a growth spurt of its own, enrollment at Stephen F. Austin State College (SFASU) jumped from 3,500 to 12,000 students in three years, and the college became a university. Unfortunately, most of the stately old homes located near the college became the first casualty of this economic growth as fast food franchises came to town, offering money for these properties that seemed like a fortune to their owners. Many visitors ask why the loveliest homes were not at least moved to another location. I always tell them, "You don't understand. There was no demand for them back then. To this generation, old was OLD. Old was leaky, old was drafty, old was hard to air condition. They had lived with old all their lives, and they were sick of it. They wanted to be modern."

Lera Thomas, a close friend of Ima Hogg and Faith Bybee, who spearheaded historic preservation in other parts of the state, had visited every major preservation project in the country. In no uncertain terms, Thomas conveyed to the town fathers the insanity of destroying the very thing that would be valued most to the "Oldest Town in Texas"—but she got nowhere. She decided to start her own preservation project stating that "if I don't do it—who will?"

The result of Lera Thomas' effort to preserve her town's heritage became Millard's Crossing Historic Village. Thomas gathered as many aging structures as she could that were "restorable" from Nacogdoches County and moved them to her own property. Those that required restoration were repaired using authentic materials as much as possible. Today, Millard's Crossing is probably the most uniquely preserved collection of historical buildings in the state, if not the nation.

At first, the Village "grew like Topsy," with no particular game plan until, at some point, Thomas decided she wanted a village, which would require a church, a log office, a log school house, and a country store. Many of the structures date back to the early days of the Republic, including three particularly fine treasures: an 1840s square, log dogtrot; a two-pen log cabin constructed in 1842; and a two-story double house built in 1837 that is one of the finest examples of its kind in East Texas. The dogtrot is a favorite of the visitors. Built with massive square pine logs, it is large and classic in design with a covered breezeway, wide enough for "a dog to trot through," that connects what are essentially two separate cabins. Eventually, if the project receives funding, this house will be the centerpiece of a "homestead"—complete with a log barn, a corn crib, chicken house, and an outhouse—where the Village can move its "hands-on" education program, making the experience all the more authentic.

When the railroad came to Nacogdoches in the late 1880s,

the track turned northeast to Shreveport and crossed Millard property, which is why Thomas called her Village “Millard’s Crossing.” Today, one can still hear the trains as they pass on the north side of the Village. A pre-1916 wooden caboose, once part of the Nacogdoches and Southeastern line chartered in 1905 to log the Angelina and Attoyac River bottoms, represents train history at Millard’s Crossing Historic Village.

My first acquaintance with Thomas was from the headlines in our local newspaper. Everything she did was either in the headlines or on the front page. “Who is this Lera Thomas?” I thought at the time. I had not lived in Nacogdoches long enough to know, but twenty years later I found out. In 1989, after earning a teaching certificate, on an impulse, I answered an ad and was hired for the position of tour guide at Millard’s Crossing, the most challenging job of my life. Getting on with Thomas was not an easy matter—her temper was legendary—but I survived, learning some valuable lessons from her.

For one thing, Thomas was a businesswoman. I will never forget the day she stopped me and asked how the visitation was going. I replied, cheerily, that we had about fifteen visitors that day. She gave me a hard look and asked, “Does that pay your salary?” I had to confess, it did not. Not in charge of the finances at that time, I had not worried about budget shortfalls; but when I was appointed director of the Village after her death in 1993, I discovered that they were annual, and relentless. As programs were built and rental facilities improved, so did our financial situation—but it was never enough for such a large and aging complex.

In 1982, Thomas, who worried about what would happen to the Village after she passed, donated roughly half of the property to Communities Foundation of Texas along with an endowment grant from the Brown Foundation. This move provided tax exempt status for the Village and shared management responsi-

bilities. It was an uneasy partnership but it saved the Village from being closed upon her death.

When I took on the directorship, there was no mission statement—something I knew little about until I attended “museum school” at Winedale. I thought long and hard about the goals of Millard’s Crossing. For Thomas, the village sought to save threatened Nacogdoches County structures and, in doing so, established a place to display her collection of curios and antiques collected in her world travels. What a collection it was! I soon discovered from older area residents what all the tools in the collection were for, why the buildings were designed as they were, and how they reflected the story of pioneering in East Texas. Our mission statement now goes way beyond preservation.

My new employers were very supportive and approved ideas for a “hands-on” education program. Today we teach subsistence farming, how it built character, and how it reflects the strength, resourcefulness, and toughness of the people who settled the state. In doing so, we connect the generations by simulating the experiences of past generations for today’s children, by having them do “chores.” School children learn how to operate a push-plow, plant corn, how to do “Mama’s laundry” by utilizing water from a well and a hand wringer on the back porch of one of the houses, shelling corn by hand, and then being introduced to the wonder of a mechanical corn sheller. Finally, they attend school in the log school house and learn to write with quill pens to “better” themselves so they may not have to work so hard to survive in adulthood.

Children also experience the fun of an old-fashioned childhood, playing games known to their grandfathers such “anty over” (two teams throwing and trying to catch a ball over the school house), making toys out of corn cobs, and having a corn cob dart fight as they learn first-hand how children created their own amusements. For closure, they are told to go home and to share their experiences with older members of their families to establish a dialog between the generations, which is an important step in learning from the past.

According to a recent Pew Foundation poll, eighty per cent

Children attend school at Millard’s Crossing where they wear old-fashioned hats and bonnets and learn to write with quill pens.



Millard’s Crossing is more than just a museum. Its award-winning “hands-on” programs give children an opportunity to feel what it was like to live, play, and work in another time period in Texas.



agreed that a generation gap exists in America.¹ In today's single-family units, fewer opportunities exist for passing down wisdom from older, caring family members to younger generations. Millard's Crossing, with its hands-on program, attempts to bridge that gap.

Adult visitors who take the tours get back to the "good" in the "good old days" as they play "guess what it is" and attend school—writing with quill pens and wearing hats, and bonnets. All visitors have the fun of tapping their feet to the peppy tunes of an Edison phonograph, an old player piano, or one of many pump organs that are kept in working order.

My background includes theatre, so many of our events attempt to bring history alive. For instance, on Halloween night the Village hosts "The Ghosts of Millard's Crossing" with actors, posing as former residents of the houses, sitting on the porches and telling their stories to their visitors. "An old Fashioned Christmas" includes lots of live music, live theatre with a presentation of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" in the chapel, and a great variety of activities for visitors to enjoy including "learn on the spot" contra-dancing. Melodramas are also performed at events both at the Village and in town.

As its motto asserts, Millard's Crossing is indeed more than a museum; it is also a classroom, a place for weddings, receptions, banquets, and guided tours. Visitors come as close to touching the past as they possibly can. It is one thing to read and project oneself into the past, it is quite another to stand in the past and look out at the surrounding nineteenth century shops, church, barber shop, general store, and homes. Places like Millard's Crossing take pages of history and infuse them with a tangible

sense of the past. How that is done makes this place more than a museum.

In the last fifteen years, the Village has won many awards for its "hands-on" programs from the Texas tourism industry, as well as a Citation of Honor from the Northeast Texas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Two of the buildings bear medallions from the Texas Historical Commission and the Village is highly commended by teachers from area schools at all levels. Millard's Crossing partners with SFASU, and other local colleges, serving as a resource for students in education, history, hospitality, film, photography, and interpretive classes.

In 2004, the Village applied for grants to improve several of its structures, including the church and a Victorian house that were rented out for weddings and private parties as a cost-effective source of income. However, when approaching larger foundations, Village administrators discovered that Millard's Crossing was not considered "a good receiving entity" because of its ownership structure. Communities Foundation of Texas owned half, and Thomas' daughter and heir to the property, Anne Lasater, owned the remainder. The Village's eligibility for large grants, rested on its becoming a singly-owned local 501(c) (3) non-profit organization. Nacogdoches rallied, donating generously to a legacy campaign initiated to demonstrate community support. Made possible by the cooperation of Communities Foundation of Texas and Lasater, Village ownership transferred to Millard's Crossing Historic Village, Inc. in 2008.

Millard's Crossing Historic Village is an amazing place. Yet, few outside of East Texas have ever heard of it or know that the Village is one of the largest historic complexes in the state. Ideally located at the gateway to heritage tourism on El Camino Real, it has the potential to become a crown jewel for heritage tourism in Texas. In 2008, the Texas Historical Foundation recognized that potential by choosing the Village as its annual project, making a generous donation. Thomas did an incredible thing when she began the preservation project at Millard's Crossing—then she passed the baton to the next generation to take it and run with it.

Millard's Crossing Historic Village is located at 6020 North Street (Business U.S. 59 North), P.O. Box 634221, Nacogdoches, Texas 75963, 936-564-6631. Hours of operation are Monday through Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Sunday, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Guided tours are \$6.00 for adults and \$5.00 for children; self-guided tours are \$1.00. For additional information, visit www.millardscrossing.com.

Susie Lower was raised in New Jersey and came to Texas in 1965. She is an avid birdwatcher, acts in local theatre, produces melodramas, and plays keyboard for Susie & the Jazzdaddys. Susie has been the Executive Director at Millard's Crossing for twenty years.

Ernesto Valdés has a B.A. from Trinity University, a J.D. from South Texas College of Law, and an M.A. in Public History. He serves as Director for the Oral History Project in the Center for Public History at the University of Houston.



Children experience life in early Texas through the education programs at Millard's Crossing. Here children are push-plowing as they learn about subsistence farming.

FORGING A COMMUNITY: THE RISE OF GAY POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN HOUSTON

by John Goins

On the evening of January 2, 1971, the University of Houston's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) staged a demonstration in front of a local bar called the Red Room. A social movement organization, the GLF was protesting the downtown bar's racial segregation policies, and participants handed out flyers printed with the following:

BOYCOTT THE RED ROOM — The Gay Liberation Front of Houston regrets that the gay brothers and sisters of Houston are not together. The management of a local Gay Bar, the Red Room unfortunately refuses service to blacks. The discriminatory actions of the Red Room management are clearly racist moves that are a continuation of the repressive and racist attitudes of white Houstonians. These racist attitudes oppress all gays as long as the Red Room and others discriminate against blacks. Disposal of oppressive attitudes is a necessity and demand. We are all prisoners of the Amerikan death culture.¹

The bar's management notified the Houston Police Department (HPD), complaining about the protest in front of their establishment. What made this complaint significant was that the Red Room was calling for assistance from law enforcement at a time when police harassment was at the forefront of the minds of homosexuals as they sought places to meet and socialize. This incident exposed deep-seated differences that existed in the Houston gay liberation movement in the early 1970s and revealed a community fraught with disagreements and questions.

An examination of the GLF, along with Integrity/Houston, and the Gay Political Caucus (GPC), provides an excellent window into the rise of the homosexual community's political power and its evolution—from the radical tactics of the GLF in 1971, to the formation of the more politically savvy GPC later in the decade. During this period gay social movement organizations in cities around the nation discovered the value of power wielded by working inside the system to create change rather than waging war against it; however, no one group represented



Mayor Annise Parker on election night with (from left), son LuJac, partner Kathy Hubbard, and daughters Daniela and Marquita.

Photo courtesy of photographer Dalton DeHart.

the entire gay population. Houston was, and still remains, host to a large and diverse gay community with members at various stages of confronting their sexualities. While some were college students who might identify with a movement such as the GLF, others held business or professional jobs that would not permit it.

The Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 are most often associated with the birth of the nationwide gay liberation movement. On the eve of the Stonewall Riots, fifty gay and lesbian social change organizations existed across the country; in 1973, the number had risen to at least 800. While the Stonewall Riots were the spark that started the movement, the solidarity achieved during the AIDS crisis—which is considered to have hit Houston in 1982—is most often credited with its long-term successes.² Throughout the period, Houston was experiencing the same problems as other major cities: police harassment, discrimination in the workplace, and repression through archaic penal codes. It also witnessed the emergence of local gay social movement organizations within the community.

THE POST-STONEWALL CLIMATE IN HOUSTON

In the early 1970s, Houston's gay movement organizations reflected disparate goals and lacked any concrete strategies for change. One historian wrote of Houston in the 1960s that “[a] side from the mostly straight-owned gay bars and the hundred or so ‘A-list’ gay men who hosted the Diana Awards, a parody of the Oscars, there were mostly closeted individuals, some of whom displayed the southern fondness of eccentricity.”³

In addition to this community, a small contingency formed with an aim toward political organizing. Three soon-to-be activists, Ray Hill, David Patterson, and Rita Wanstrom, created the Prometheon Society to serve as a support group for gays in the city. Ray Hill lived in Houston as did Rita Wanstrom, who owned a bar called the Roaring Sixties. David Patterson contributed his familiarity with homophile organizations and bar communities around the rest of the country. The Prometheon members' short-lived activism resulted in negotiations with police to create a moderately safer atmosphere in the bars. Prior to their efforts and remaining true afterwards, gay Houstonians regularly feared arrest when visiting their favorite bars. Before forming the Prometheons, Wanstrom's bar had been raided and twenty-five lesbians arrested for wearing fly-front pants. Although things improved after Prometheon's efforts, harassment still occurred. Police raided the popular gay bar, Mary's, in 1979 and in 1980 during Gay Pride Festivities. On one such occasion sixty-one were carried off to jail on various charges.⁴

Creating a better relationship with the police presented a dilemma for liberation activism. Now that gays and lesbians could more safely meet in bars, many became less compelled to risk coming “out of the closet.” This majority considered their jobs and the rest of their lives more important than marching in the streets.

An editorial by editor Jim Lloyd in Houston's *Nuntius* noted comments that were oft-heard during this period: “Oh, I think they're going too far; they're just antagonizing everybody,” and, “Why don't they stop rocking the boat—all they do is attract a lot of attention to us, I think it's better if the straights don't know so much about us.” Lloyd addressed these points by reminding readers that social change had never occurred without a “lot of people being antagonized.”⁵

By 1971 a Houston chapter of the GLF began meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the University of Houston. It garnered greater attention than the Prometheons but was not well received by everyone in the gay community. Holding the same radical attitudes as the GLF in New York, it used anarchistic rhetoric with few specific proposals for confronting the community's most urgent needs.⁶

According to a February 1971 issue of the University of Houston's campus newspaper, the *Daily Cougar*, the organization consisted of thirty to forty people “trying to awaken others in this area to self liberation.” The editorial column in Houston's *Nuntius*, “The Gay Guard,” spoke very negatively of the GLF by referring to their “goon-squad tactics and their cowardly, anonymous threats to destroy the property and businesses of their fellow gays who do not agree with them.”⁷

In another article, “A View of the GLF,” a reader asked why the Front had chosen to liberate all people, even those that seemingly have no concern for gays. He continued, “The Front has taken upon itself the task of liberating all people: Blacks, Housewives, Political Dissenters, Mexican-Americans, Indians, etc. I do not believe that it is fair for this group of people to call themselves GAY when that is but a small part of their activities.” Like many post-Stonewall activist groups, the GLF chose too many battles and consequently lacked a solid focus on gay liberation.⁸

The *Daily Cougar* reported that the GLF hosted a Gay Pride Conference on campus in June 1971 in conjunction with Gay Pride Week. The article saw its movement as “a process of political and social action around its member's needs.” The column quoted the GLF's intentions to “build more meaningful lives without shame or guilt.”⁹

While the GLF sought to contribute to the community in a positive manner, it created controversy instead when the conference received the attention of state representatives. Local members of the House questioned whether the on-campus activities had made inappropriate use of state funds under Section 4 of the



The GPC announced its formation at a 1975 press conference. From left to right: the Reverend Bob Falls, Ray Hill, Jerry Miller, and Pokey Anderson.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

House Appropriations Bill. Houston Republican Representative A. S. Bowers began a personal investigation that was aimed at GLF, as well as women's liberation, and an anti-war group.¹⁰

In 1970 another significant organization, Integrity, emerged in the gay community. Developed from a small group that met each Sunday at the Holy Rosary Church on Travis Street, Integrity began when a group of gays approached a Catholic priest about having meetings at the church. Eventually, it expanded beyond religious aims and became independent of the Catholic Church renaming itself Integrity/Houston (I/H).¹¹

I/H did not seek the radical restructuring of society advocated by GLF. Instead, it maintained a speaker's bureau to address educational opportunities for both gay and straight audiences in Houston. It offered screenings for venereal disease in a setting where gay men could be tested without fear of judgmental medical staff.¹² Further, the group was the first to go before the Houston City Council to ask support for gay causes.

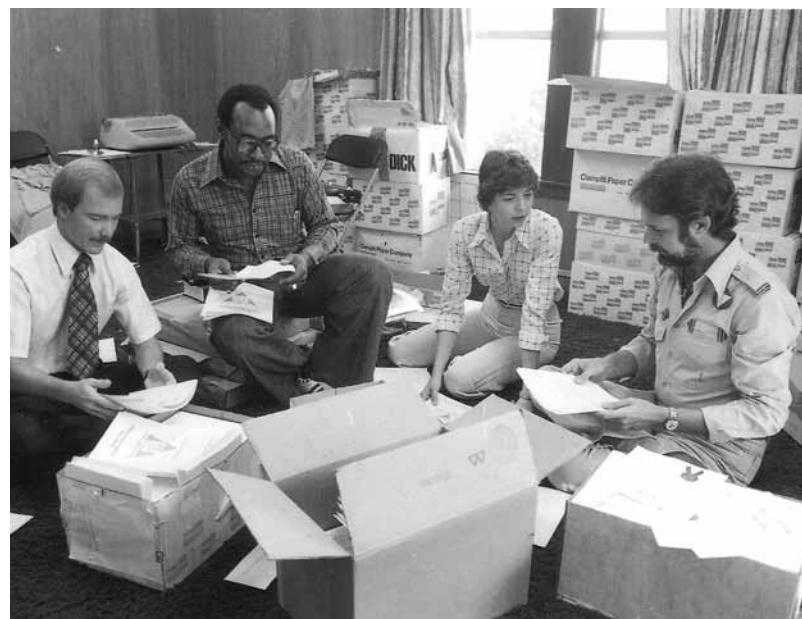
I/H made its first true political strides by conducting a secret interview with mayoral candidate Fred Hofheinz on October 28, 1973. Hofheinz came to the closed-door session alone and conversed openly with members for an hour. They asked for four main points of reform: equal consideration in hiring for civil service jobs, an end to police harassment, a liaison with the police department, and instruction in the police academy on sensitivity to minority issues. I/H members left the meeting with new optimism and circulated flyers to twenty-five gay bars soliciting votes for the politician. Hofheinz achieved a narrow, 3,000 vote victory, and gays claimed credit for the election outcome. Hofheinz appointed a new police chief, C. M. Lynn, who promised not to raid the bars frequented by gays as long as nothing illegal was taking place.¹³

Critics, however, saw I/H as a throwback to or continuation of the 1950s homophile movement philosophies. It preached the message of the first predominate homophile group, the Mattachine Society: "What I do reflects on you. What you do reflects on me. What we do reflects on the entire gay community." I/H members called on the bar crowd to practice "enlightened self interest" and continually reminded them of the frequent visits made by plainclothes vice officers. This pressure for respectability toward mainstream society had alienated many in the homophile groups of the earlier decades and deterred potential members during the climate of the 1970s as well. As with GLF, although for different reasons, I/H lacked a broad appeal to recruit large numbers from Houston's homosexual community.¹⁴

The GLF had attracted publicity for the homosexual movement in Houston but fell short in achieving unity for the movement locally. By contrast, I/H began utilizing political power that signaled a shift toward the type of social movement organization that would accomplish lasting results when the community was confronted with the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

In 1973 the Texas legislature dealt a blow to the gay community when it updated the state penal code Section 21:06 and made homosexual conduct a Class C misdemeanor and, therefore, punishable by a fine of up to \$200. (This remained the law until 2003 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Lawrence v. Texas* that state laws criminalizing private sexual activity between consenting adults on the basis of morality were unconstitutional due to the lack of a justification for state interest in such a matter.) With relationships between same sex partners being

illegal, police harassment of homosexuals and discrimination in hiring practices were acceptable. How, then, could activists go about changing the law? How could reforms be accomplished with most of the community hidden behind the lines?



Leaders of the politically oriented Town Meeting I, from left to right, are: Steve Shiflett, Charles Law, LaDonna Leake, and Ray Hill.

© Houston Chronicle.

THE GPC AND SUCCESS

The Gay Political Caucus (GPC) formed in 1975 and proved to be the definitive achievement for the gay and lesbian community in Houston. Its energy and success are attributable not only to the decades-long liberation movement nationwide but also to a few local, long-time activists with the experience, knowledge, and foresight to understand the advantages of organized political activism. The GPC, unlike the more radical groups before it, utilized tactics that encouraged a larger majority of the homosexual community to become involved. The community had size and strength, but individual's business and professional careers maintained priority over any radical style of social activism. This is evidenced, in part, by the fact that the active GPC membership in the early 1980s averaged only about ten percent of the number of people on its mailing list, which rose from 8,022 in 1980 to 15,000 in 1982. Although the gay community wanted to stay informed on social and political issues, discretion appeared to be especially important in the conservative Texas climate.¹⁵

In a 1979 survey performed by the *Advocate*, a periodical addressing gay and lesbian issues, four hundred readers responded from Houston. The *Houston Post* published the results: 95% were registered to vote; 49.3% belonged to a local gay organization; 30% belonged to a national gay organization; 73.9% made a financial donation to a political campaign in the last two years; 86.9% had contributed to a gay cause; 80% knew someone who had experienced repression, discrimination, or police harassment; and 20% had directly experienced the above.¹⁶ *Advocate* editor Robert McQueen called the survey evidence that Houston was, "very political, very visible, successful."¹⁷ This was the community that the GPC pledged to recruit. By the early 1980s,

many political leaders reached a consensus that several election victories were attributable to the GPC's endorsements.

The GPC officially began with a press conference held on June 30, 1975, when "Pokey" Anderson, Ray Hill, Bob Falls, and Jerry Miller announced the formation of a new political organization to represent the gay and lesbian community in Houston. The *Houston Post*, the *Houston Chronicle*, as well as local radio and television stations covered the event. Pokey Anderson, who represented Houston's lesbian community, began her life as an activist in 1973 after attending the first National Women's Political Caucus Convention at Houston's Rice Hotel. Additionally, she was involved at the Montrose Gaze Community Center, named for the near-downtown neighborhood known for its concentration of gay and lesbian businesses and services. Ray Hill, a founder of the Prometheon Society, provided valuable advice for the caucus as a long-time Houston activist and one of the very few who was willing to go public.

Reverend Bob Falls was the leader of Houston's newly founded Metropolitan Community Church of the Resurrection (MCCR). The church had evolved from a small group of Christian gays that began meeting together in the summer of 1973. Jerry Miller represented I/H, which by then was the longest-existing gay organization in Houston.¹⁸

The team became more formidable with the addition of Gary Van Ooteghem, who had been dismissed from his lucrative job as assistant to Harris County Treasurer Hartsell Gray for proposing a regulation protecting the civil rights of homosexuals.



Frances "Sissy" Farenthold addressed Town Meeting 1 on June 25, 1978.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

Ooteghem filed suit against the city for job discrimination and eventually won. His actions drew much publicity and quickly caught the attention of the GPC founders. At their invitation, he became the caucus's first president in February 1976.¹⁹

A GPC pamphlet produced in October 1978 revealed much about its ideals. Saying that one should join to meet people, work on committees, and assist in the preservation of gay rights, it equally stressed that being "out of the closet" was not a priority. With plenty of people "out front" already, the GPC needed more people, in any capacity, to help sustain an effective gay organization.²⁰ By not seeking militant activists, the caucus sought to represent the over-all community. The members of the GPC were interested in working within the system to bring about change in the ways in which gays and lesbians were treated in the larger society.

The GPC officially incorporated on September 9, 1975. Its first rally, held on October 21st at Cheryhurst Park, was attended by five hundred supporters and seven political candidates. In the beginning, the group labored to establish itself in the community by mailing out surveys and soliciting political candidates to endorse. It had to "chase" candidates, as one spokesperson recalled in 1980, but that changed.²¹ The GPC's success became apparent in the first year when nineteen out of the twenty-eight candidates it endorsed had won. By 1977, its second full year, the GPC was well established, and local candidates sought its endorsement.

The following policy statement reflected the GPC's moderate ideals: "Our approach is that we are reasonable people making legitimate complaints. We dress and speak like the people whose help we are seeking. Confrontation is avoided."²²

Confrontation was not avoided, however, when some three thousand gays and their supporters rallied against Anita Bryant's singing at the Texas Bar Association's annual dinner. Bryant had waged a nation-wide anti-gay campaign beginning with the successful appeal of job discrimination protection for homosexuals in Dade County, Florida. Due to a coast to coast counter attack by gay rights advocates, unity and commitment



Eleanor Tinsley after her 1979 City Council election victory. She had refused to back down despite severe criticism for winning the support of the GPC.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.



Mayor Kathy Whitmire at her inauguration in 1982. Despite criticism, she received the support of the GPC.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center,
Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

among homosexual groups increased sharply. They marched peacefully by candlelight through part of downtown Houston and ended with a rally in front of the Houston Public Library.

In 1978 growth continued when Stephen Shiflett became GPC president, bringing his business background to Houston homosexual politics. The caucus endorsed the Town Meeting 1 held at the AstroArena on June 25, 1978. Some 3,500-4,000 people attended, and two-time gubernatorial candidate Frances "Sissy" Farenthold addressed them, echoing a mantra of the civil rights movement: "No one is free unless we all are free." The participants created a broad agenda of resolutions including considerations for handicapped homosexuals, the inclusion of women in gay organizations, job discrimination, internal discrimination issues, a civilian police review board, legal reform

on 21:06 of the state penal code, discrimination in the military, implementation of single member districts, public awareness, and religious unity.²³

GPC President Shiflett thanked Mayor Jim McConn (1978-1982) for declaring June 19-25 Human Rights Week—as close as movement activists could come in 1978 to a sanctioned Gay Pride Week. The mayor responded by stating that, "I think it (the homosexual community) is becoming a viable political force." According to the *Houston Chronicle*, Ray Hill attributed the success of the Town Meeting to the fact that the local movement was not radical in scope. He stressed that the methods of "recruiting people, getting them enthusiastic and getting them working" led to far more positive consequences than militant, radical actions that moved too aggressively.²⁴

The GPC strategy worked for the election of Kathy Whitmire as city controller in 1977, and again in 1979, when the Caucus managed to unseat anti-gay councilman Frank Mann. Mann had worked against gay causes since he had taken office in 1960. Eleanor Tinsley won his seat and declared that she firmly supported antidiscrimination for homosexuals in city government and within the police force.²⁵ In 1981, when Kathy Whitmire (1982-1991) won the mayor's race, the GPC accepted much of the credit. This victory provided proof that the caucus had gained the ability to influence and win a city-wide election.

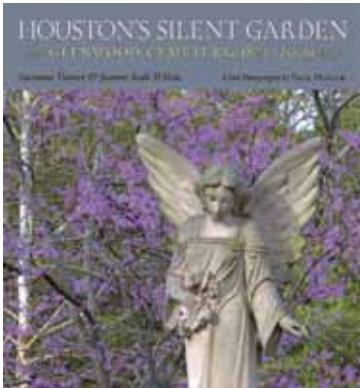
Newspapers and politicians weighed in with their opinions on the actual strength of the caucus in influencing local politics. The *Houston Post* claimed on June 25, 1978, "Stereotypes remain but city gays gain political clout." The gays that were seen by Houston's straight political community to be "little more than limp-wristed perverts, blasphemies to God that the rest of the world would be better off without" were not originally considered powerful or able to influence large numbers of votes. However, a *Post* sampling of local straight politicians in the inner city, especially in Montrose, showed that they paid attention at election time. The same article wrote that State Representative Ron Waters agreed that without gay support, a victory would be difficult if not impossible in the 79th district (Montrose). State Representative Mickey Leland sought and received GPC backing to gain Barbara Jordan's seat, and he thanked the caucus for his two-to-one lead in the Montrose district. By 1981 the successes of the GPC began to receive praise nationwide.²⁶

On December 12, 2009, Houston became the largest city in the U.S. to elect an openly gay mayor. Annise Parker accepted her victory with a speech alongside her partner of nineteen years and their three adopted children. Even though during the campaign Parker had consistently emphasized her years of experience as the city's financial comptroller over her sexual orientation, few in Houston will deny the impact of the election for lesbians and gay men throughout the country. Once again the GPC, now known as the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, played an integral part in this victory for the Houston community.²⁷

John Goins is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Houston. He teaches history at an area high school and as an adjunct instructor at a local community college.

News Updates & Books by Barbara Eaves

BOOKS



Houston's Silent Garden: Glenwood Cemetery, 1871-2009 by Suzanne Turner and Joanne Seale Wilson (Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 284 pages, list price \$60.00.

This book has it all. It is interesting, factual, historical, and beautiful. *Houston's Silent Garden* traces the 137-year story of Glenwood Cemetery from

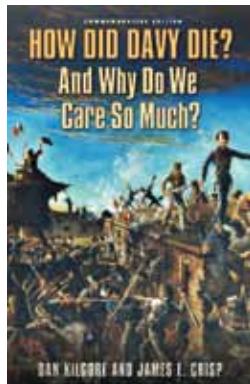
its beginnings as a burial ground outside the city limits, to today's "picturesque memorial landscape of outstanding visual quality" located within sight of the downtown skyline of the nation's fourth largest city. As pointed out in the foreword, the book covers historic, artistic, horticultural, and current material. It tells about the grand garden cemeteries in Europe with Glenwood being one of the first of this type in the southwestern United States. The book traces the highs and lows of Houston's growth and relates much about the 16,000 individuals buried there including such notable names as Allen, Baker, Brown, Clayton, Cooley, Cullinan, Farish, Hughes, Jones, Staub, and many others. It is stunningly illustrated with Paul Hester's color photographs.

How Did Davy Die? And Why Do We Care So Much? by Dan Kilgore and James E. Crisp (Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 120 pages, list price \$18.95.

Dan Kilgore debunked the myth that Davy Crockett went down on the ramparts of the Alamo swinging his rifle, "Old Betsy," in his book, *How Did Davy Die?* published in 1978. Citing the first English translation of an eyewitness account by Mexican army officer José Enrique de la Peña (and other eyewitnesses), Kilgore asserted that Crockett was taken captive and executed on Santa Anna's orders. At the time, some took his argument as a personal affront; a few threatened violence. Now, noted historian, long-time moderator of the San Jacinto Symposium, and academic sleuth, Jim Crisp reconsiders the dispute and poses the question: "And Why Do We Care So Much?" Crisp offers insights into the use of original source material. He also examines the function of myth in our culture and the racial overtones of some responses to Kilgore's work.

Hill Country Deco: Modernistic Architecture of Central Texas by David Bush and Jim Parsons (TCU Press, due Fall 2010).

A companion volume to the award-winning *Houston Deco* (released in 2008), this second book by staff members of the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance will feature contempo-



rary and historic photographs of more than 100 Art Deco and Art Moderne buildings in San Antonio, Austin, and surrounding communities.

EVENTS

San Jacinto Museum of History – The recent show of photos by Cecil Thomson, a prolific Houston photographer, attracted more than 300 inquiries about the city and the man – as well as contacts from Thomson's relatives and a six-foot-long model of the *USS Houston*, which he photographed in the Houston Ship Channel several times. "Sometimes, an exhibit can be a learning experience for both the public and the museum staff," said Elizabeth Appleby, curator. This new information is the basis for an exhibit at the Monument on March 12, *Reflections of an Exhibit: Cecil Thomson Revealed*. To learn more, visit www.sanjacinto-museum.org.

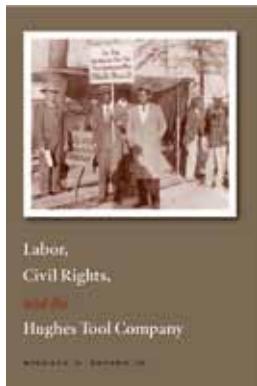
The Heritage Society – The traveling exhibit, *A Tejano Son of Texas*, tells the life story of legendary Texas Tejano José Policarpio "Polly" Rodriguez, beginning with the start of his life in the State of Coahuila y Texas, Mexico, and continuing through his experiences as a gunsmith, surveyor, Texas Ranger, rancher, and Methodist minister. Appearing April 12 through June 27, 2010, at 1100 Bagby. For more information, call 713-655-1912.

Brazos Book Signing – Both Jim Crisp and Jim Bevill will appear jointly at Brazos Bookstore to discuss their new books at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, April 15. Crisp, the long-time moderator of the San Jacinto Symposium, will discuss *How Did Davy Die? And Why Do We Care So Much?* (see above). At this same event, Bevill, past president of the Texas Numismatic Association and first vice president – investments, UBS Financial Services, Inc., will sign copies of his book, *The Paper Republic: The Struggle for Money, Credit, and Independence in the Republic of Texas* (Bright Sky Press, 2009), list price \$60.00. Brazos Bookstore is located at 2421 Bissonnet.

San Jacinto Symposium – "Skulls, Slaves and Sex: Secrets of Early Texas" is the theme of the tenth annual San Jacinto Symposium, held 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday, April 17, at the Hilton University of Houston Hotel and Conference Center. Six skulls of Mexican soldiers slain at the Battle of San Jacinto were discovered at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology last year. How they got there and what they tell us will be discussed by Texas historian Ron Tyler and Smithsonian forensic anthropologist Doug Owsley. "The Slaveholders' Republic" will be addressed by Andrew J. Torget, creator of the digital Texas Slavery Project at the University of North Texas. Sex will be the subject explored by James W. Paulsen, a family and marital law professor at South Texas College of Law, and Lael Morgan, a journalist and author. Paulsen will ponder "Was Sam a Bigamist?" and Morgan's topic will be "Texas' Philandering Founders." For additional information, visit www.friendsofsanjacinto.org, or call 713-237-8997 for an invitation. The \$50.00 fee covers lunch and parking.

The Texas Historical Commissions' 2010 Preservation Conference will be held April 22-24 at the Westin Oaks Houston. The brochure and registration are available online at www.thc.state.tx.us. This annual event is sponsored by the Texas Historical Commission and Preservation Texas. The Harris County Historical Commission will host the 2010 Houston meeting in Houston.

AWARDS



Julia Ideson Awards – The 2009 award was won by Michael Botson, Ph.D., for his book, *Labor, Civil Rights, and the Hughes Tool Company* (Texas A&M University Press).

Honorable mention went to Michael Vance for his weekly television program. *Postcards from Texas* airs at 4:00 p.m. Sundays, and repeats 7:00 p.m. Saturdays, on KTBU-TV, Channel 55.

How to Enter for 2010: Books and other published work completed within the past five years may be nominated. Entries must have made significant use of the resources of the Texas Room/Houston Metropolitan Research Center and must be postmarked by June 1, 2010. For information, visit www.friendsofthetexasroom.org.

OTHER NEWS

Houston Preservation Website – In late April, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission will launch a new website, www.HoustonPreservation.org. Intended to educate the public about historic preservation in our city, it will feature an innovative approach to the many faces of preservation.

Julia Ideson Building – The Houston Public Library announced that the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) will reopen to the public on Monday, April 5, 2010. Resources available include the collections and archives at the Texas and Local History Room. Customers will be able to access HMRC resourc-

es Monday through Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The entrance to the new wing is located through the garden on the Lamar and Smith sides of the building. Meanwhile, restoration work has begun on the 1926 building. Cost of the total project is \$32 million – more than \$29.4 million of which has already been raised by the non-profit Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners, headed by Phoebe Tudor. To make a tax-deductible gift toward the approximately \$2.5 million still needed, contact JILPP executive director Margaret Lawler at 713-660-0772 or log onto <http://ideson.org/pdf/pledgeform.pdf>.

Houston Arts & Media (HAM) – Join Michael Vance and other local writers, film makers, and media artists in their collaboration to bring Houston history to life. A \$40.00 membership includes *HAM Slices Volume One*, a high resolution, fully searchable DVD that contains twenty stories about everything from the Sylvan Beach Bathing Girl Revue, to Jean Lafite, and more. Visit www.houstonartsandmedia.org for a comprehensive listing of HAM's many tours, projects, meetings, etc.

DATES TO SAVE:

April 14, 2010 – San Jacinto Museum of History annual fund raising dinner, www.sanjacinto-museum.org.

April 17, 2010 – San Jacinto Symposium, Hilton University of Houston Hotel and Conference Center.
www.friendsofsanjacinto.org.

April 21, 2010 – Battle of San Jacinto commemoration at the monument, 10:00 a.m.

April 22-24, 2010 – Texas Historical Commission's State Preservation Conference at the Westin Galleria, www.thc.state.tx.us. Click on "about us," then "annual conference."

April 24, 2010 – San Jacinto Festival all day at the San Jacinto Battleground. Visit with "living historians" from 10:00 a.m.; battle re-enactment is at 3:30 p.m.

Contact Barbara Eaves (barbara.eaves@att.net) with news and events for the next edition.



Battle of San Jacinto re-enactment.

Photo courtesy of
San Jacinto Museum of History.

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ENDNOTES

NOW SHOWING: "ONE SINGULAR SENSATION..."

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- 3 Susan Johnston Barnes, *Oveta Culp Hobby*, Al Shire, ed., (private printing), 5-7. Al Shire's book contains many memories of Hobby family and friends.
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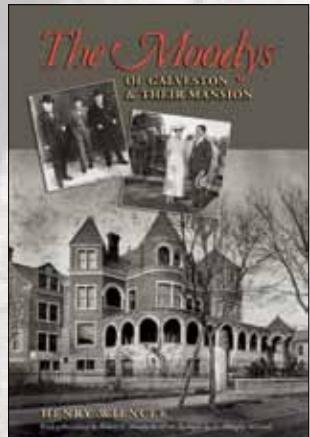
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