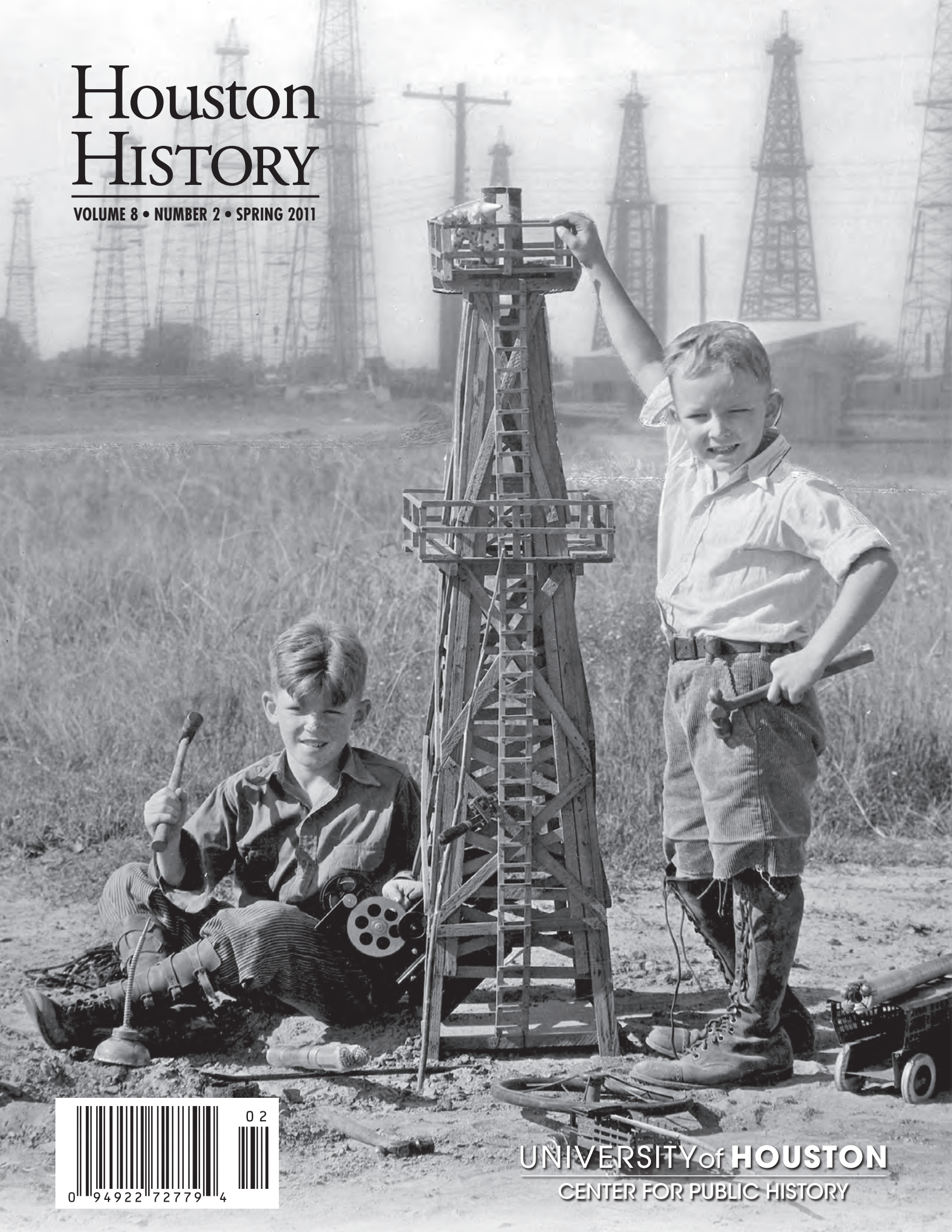


# Houston HISTORY

VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 2 • SPRING 2011



UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY





# Oil and the Soul of Houston



Last fall the Jung Center sponsored a series of lectures called “Energy and the Soul of Houston.” My friend Beth Robertson persuaded me that I had something to say about energy, if not Houston’s soul. We agreed to share the stage.

She reflected on the life of her grandfather, the wildcatter

Hugh Roy Cullen. I followed with thoughts about the life of my father, petrochemical plant worker Woodrow Wilson Pratt. Together we speculated on how our region’s soul—or at least its spirit—had been shaped by its famous wildcatters’ quest for oil and the quest for upward mobility by the hundreds of thousands of anonymous workers who migrated to the plants on the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coasts.

Beth spoke of the wildcatters’ values: “The soul of Houston’s collective consciousness is the measure of Houston’s wildcatters—individualistic, independent, inventive, bold, determined, risk-takers, men of their word, never give up, hard working, hard playing, never take anything for granted.” The “can do” spirit of Hugh Roy Cullen and other wildcatters permeated Houston as it matured into a major metropolis in the mid-twentieth century.

Cullen came to the Houston region in search of oil in 1911, and he found plenty of it. His proud granddaughter described handshake deals involving millions. She recalled the drilling of the famous Thompson field near the Brazos River where her granddad and his workers did not give up, even though they had great difficulties setting up the well and then had to deal with two disastrous blow-outs a year later. On another project, her “pig-headed” granddad argued with his partner, Big Jim West, about drilling a discovery well at the exhausted Humble field, where “It was hard to even find a place to drill there were so many abandoned rigs.” But he was determined, and “It was here that he did his drilling magic and managed to penetrate the heaving Jackson shale. . . . Gumption, guts, perseverance, inventiveness. It was an engineering feat and one that honored him with an Honorary Doctorate of Science from the University of Pittsburgh—pretty cool for a guy who only got through the fifth grade.”

The wildcatters showed their gratitude to their city through their philanthropy. They were not the only ones who supported good causes in our region, but many of the foundations in Houston had their beginning in the oil and gas industries. The Cullen Foundation left a living legacy at the University of Houston and the Texas Medical Center. I was a beneficiary of their generosity, having been recruited by the promise of a Cullen Professorship to come to UH.

Those who migrated to factory jobs in the region shared some of the attributes of the wildcatters. They were risk takers on a grand scale, betting their lives and those of their children that they could expand their choices by moving to the region. They were hard working and determined, as anyone who has worked a sixteen-hour overtime shift in a manufacturing plant would not dispute. They certainly took nothing for granted; many of them had come from rural poverty and appreciated the steady work, hourly wages, paid vacations, and health benefits of work in the refineries.

They measured success not in oil wells discovered, but in the dignity of jobs well done, the strength of their families, and the high school and even college graduations of their children. They did not, of course, create philanthropic foundations, but they did support their churches, unions, fraternal organizations, and above all, their local schools. They contributed their own time and energies to the sort of things that built sturdy communities. As a boy, the ones that mattered most to me were the great youth-league baseball fields our dads built and maintained. With their sweat they changed vacant lots into fields of dreams, where they coached us in the nuances of a game they loved and in the work ethic needed later in life to move a step beyond the refineries.

My family was part of the mass migration to the factories on the Gulf Coast from East Texas, South Louisiana, the Valley, northern Mexico, and other places too numerous to name. Both my mom and my dad came from large farming families, giving me twenty-eight aunts and uncles. Most of them found their way to non-agricultural jobs in the area between Lake Charles and the Houston Ship Channel after World War II. Most of my forty or so cousins grew up in this region and then made their lives here.

Our region celebrates the energy of the wildcatters who helped make Houston the nation’s oil capital, but it also absorbed the energy of the refinery workers who helped define it as a working class city. The spirit of Houston captures both the exuberance of its wildcatters and the aspirations of its factory workers.

The soul of Houston is more difficult to comprehend. I felt it several years ago, however, as I presided over a graduation ceremony for almost nine hundred students at the University of Houston. I stood on the stage as Dean Pratt—a plant worker’s son masquerading as a university professor, wearing academic robes instead of a hardhat. Each graduate stopped to shake my hand and take the diploma that symbolized so much about his or her family’s progress across generations. Joyful noise rolled over me as families yelled out their love and pride when their Joe—by any other name—walked across the stage. The celebration done, I returned to my office past buildings bearing the names of wildcatters and through throngs of students bearing the family names of refinery workers. We were all part of the soul of Houston, city of opportunity.

## IN MEMORY OF ELIZABETH D. ROCKWELL

May 19, 1921 – January 28, 2011

Friend of the University of Houston



# Houston History

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## Oil in Houston

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**Cover Photo:** Texas children back in 1928 had their own unique toys with which to play. These two boys celebrate their first partnership in a make believe world of fame and fortune.

Photo courtesy of Story Sloane Gallery, Houston, Texas.

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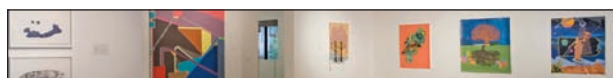
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*By Barbara Eaves*



All photos courtesy of Story Sloane's Gallery, Houston, Texas.



# Faces of Texas Oil

By Story Sloane III





The history of the oil industry in Texas is comprised of many elements. The towering wooden derricks, both cable and rotary, of the early twentieth century would give way to the even bigger steel-framed derricks of the 1930s and on. The art of pounding a hole into the ground would evolve rapidly, providing innovative advancements of drilling technologies. Old drillers remember when the fishtail bit reigned as the best tool available to get the job done; well, that held true until the rotary bit came on the scene. If the operator was lucky enough to produce a genuine Texas gusher, then he needed a pipeline to hook the well up to a battery of storage containers. The refining process would produce gasoline and motor oil, creating service stations that still, even decades later, remain permanent landmarks in our society. Perhaps the most important element of this fantastic industry is the human element. A combination of investors, company men, driller/wildcatters, engineers, and roughnecks provided the necessary glue to bind this growing industry together. The following images illustrate the early faces of Texas oil.

**Story Sloane III** is a native Houstonian and holder of one the city's premier private historic photo collections. He is an advocate for preserving Houston's history and the owner of Story Sloane Gallery.

*One sure fire way to tell the company men from the roughnecks was the style of dress each chose to wear on location. Only a company man could get away with wearing a white shirt on the derrick floor. This 1930s rig was located in East Texas near Saratoga.*

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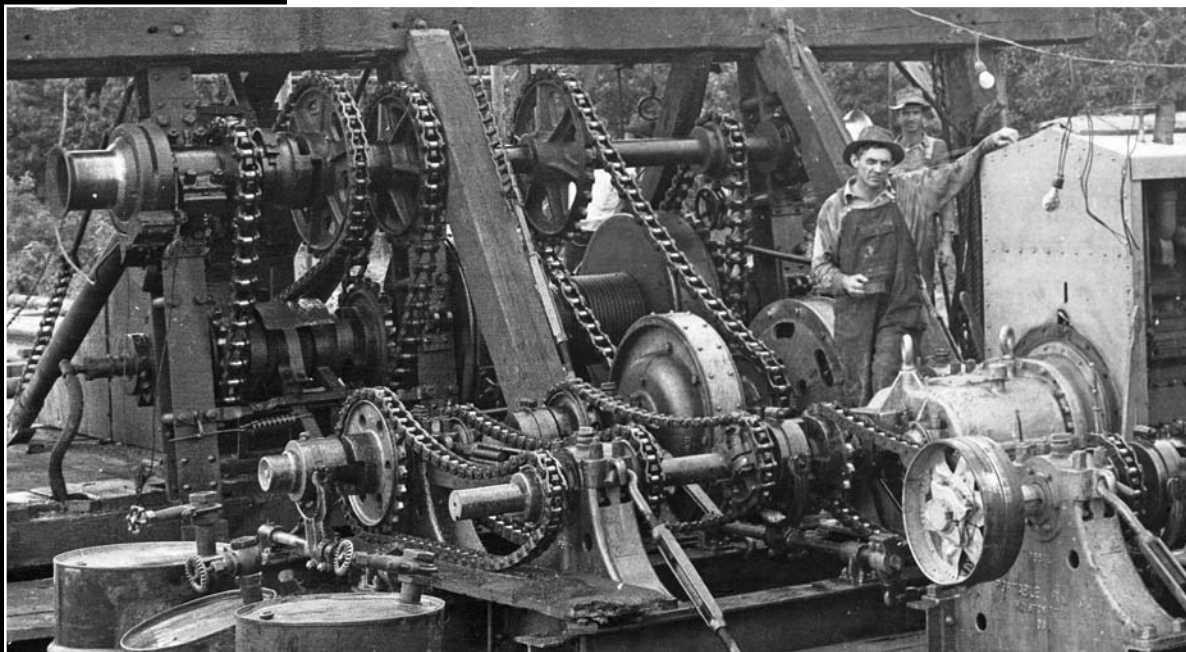
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*The act of having a good smoke while drilling a well was commonplace and is illustrated here by driller Jack O'Neil and his crew in 1924. This rig stood just outside of Laredo Texas. Note man's best friend camouflaged against a roughneck.*







*It takes a little more than a college degree at this end of the game. These roustabouts make sure the gears and chains of power stayed greased.*



*One of the most famous faces of Texas oil was Michel Halbouty, pictured here in his 1927 lab.*

*The investors and company men of Franklin Oil climb high on this central Texas cable rig for a 1918 public relations photo.*



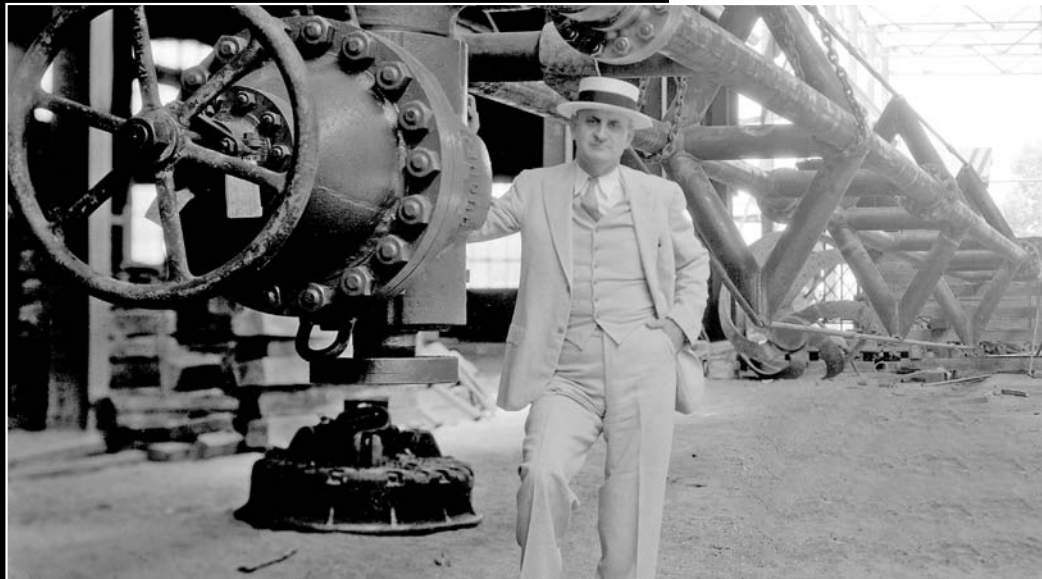


*The Pierce Junction oil field was considered the closest oil patch to Houston. Located near the future Astrodome site south of town, this 1928 drilling crew consisted of seasoned veterans and one apprehensive teenager.*



*Many in the field considered it bad luck to have a woman on a well site—unless you were the wife of a driller. This mid 1930s LaSalle and rig were located in west Texas.*





*Home-grown, self-taught Texas oil well fire fighter H.L. Patton would end up losing an arm and his brother putting out oil fires all over the world. Pictured here at the Hughes Tool pipe yard, this pioneer would live to the ripe old age of 100.*



*Technological advancements in the industry like this early 1930s logging tool gave many engineers the opportunity to share in the wealth.*



# We're Sticking by Our Union: The Battle for Baytown, 1942-1943

*By Michael Botson*

Between June 1942 and November 1943, Baytown, Texas, became the backdrop to one of the most dramatic labor confrontations to rock the upper Texas Gulf Coast during World War II. In this prolonged conflict, workers at Humble Oil's Baytown refinery battled one another over what union they wanted representing them. Nine years earlier such worker militancy was unheard of, but that all changed in 1933 when New Deal labor legislation and reforms energized the Texas labor movement fueling worker activism. Since 1933, refinery workers at Humble Oil had been battling management and warring among themselves over the kind of union they wanted representing them.<sup>1</sup> It marked a new era in Texas labor relations. By 1942, Humble Oil & Refining Company grudgingly accepted the fact that it must deal with organized employees who demanded a voice over working conditions and pay. But employees split over the issue of representation pitting those loyal to the Baytown Employees Federation against their colleagues in the Oil Workers International Union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

CIO supporters regarded their union as a strong advocate willing to challenge what they saw as the feudalistic labor relations of Humble Oil. Federation men rejected the CIO as an outside organization bent on trouble. They viewed the Federation as their organization best able to represent them based on its tradition of cooperative labor relations with management dating back to 1920. Additionally, the federal government loomed large over the conflict for two reasons. First, the Wagner Act established guidelines for peacefully settling disputes between competing unions and prosecuting unfair labor practices by employers. Secondly,



*A view of the center of the Baytown refinery during World War II. The light-ends fractionating towers are in the foreground, and the toluene facilities are in the background.*

*Photo from History of Humble Oil & Refining Company.*



Humble Oil's Baytown refinery produced 100 octane gasoline, a wartime essential needed to defeat the Axis powers. America could not afford to allow a labor dispute at Humble Oil to disrupt the flow of fuel that kept its planes and tanks running. Ultimately though, two overarching and overlapping issues decided the outcome of the struggle: Humble Oil's labor relations policy patterned after the Standard Oil Corporation and race.

Initially, Humble Oil's labor relations policy reflected the philosophy of its conservative southern founders: Ross Sterling, Walter Fondren, Robert Blaffer, and William Farish. For them, exerting control over their employees consisted of a combination of aristocratic southern paternalism mixed with a heavy iron fist when needed. Any attempt by whomever they considered outsiders, specifically the federal government or labor unions, that interfered with their relationship with their employees was robustly resisted. They crushed their employees' first union organizing campaign during the Goose Creek Oil Field Strike in 1917.<sup>2</sup> In 1920, Humble Oil & Refining became a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey. Humble adopted Standard's labor relations policy as laid out under the Colorado Industrial Relations Plan. The plan consisted of four elements: a corporate welfare system, a grievance procedure, an employees' bill of rights, and, lastly, a plan for Joint Councils, eventually called Employee Representation Plans (ERP) containing representatives elected by employees and those appointed by management.<sup>3</sup>

The plan appeared to establish joint governance over

labor relations between management and the employees through the Joint Council, Humble's ERP. But the agreements formulated in the Council lacked substance since they were not the result of negotiations between two parties holding equal power and respecting each other's strength. As a result, nothing compelled management to honor agreements reached through the Joint Council. Paternalistic in nature and anti-union in objective, the plan cemented management control over industrial relations. Management wielded veto power over all decisions reached by the Joint Council.<sup>4</sup> The Colorado Industrial Relations Plan and Joint Council eventually unraveled under the weight of the Great Depression, New Deal labor legislation, in particular the Wagner Act, and employee anger and disillusionment caused by their economic suffering. The Wagner Act made employer dominated labor organizations like the Joint Council illegal based on the proposition that they served as a sop to employees by appearing to give them a bargaining voice but in reality serving as a means to discourage employees from forming bona fide unions. In April 1937, the Supreme Court shocked and outraged corporate America when it upheld the Wagner Act.<sup>5</sup> Humble Oil disbanded the Joint Council since its domination over the organization violated the Wagner Act and, from its ashes, emerged the Baytown Employees Federation.

Within two weeks of disbanding the Joint Conference a group of its former members established the Employees Federation of the Humble Oil & Refining Company to re-



*In the refinery's early days foremen rode on horseback performing their duties, circa 1920.*

Photo courtesy of the Sterling Library, Baytown, Texas.



*C. S. Stone, the first person hired to work for Humble Oil in Baytown, leading a team of oxen hauling heavy equipment to the refinery construction site, circa, 1917.*

Photo courtesy of the Sterling Library, Baytown, Texas.

place it. In a hastily called election held outside the refinery gates, over 2,500 workers voted in favor of the Federation as their collective bargaining agent and only seventy-nine voted against it. In the three months following the election, the Federation solidified its position by establishing a governing council, selected employee representatives from each of the refinery departments, formulated a constitution, and entered into contract negotiations with management. In July 1937, Humble recognized the Federation as the employees' collective bargaining agent and signed a labor agreement with it.<sup>6</sup> Into this landscape came the CIO.

Immediately following the election and management's recognition of the Federation as the employees' collective bargaining agent, the CIO challenged the validity of the election results and contract. The Federation had had the ballots prepared and printed with only the Federation name appearing on them, it conducted the election, and the balloting was not secret. Testimony in a subsequent Labor Board hearing showed that supervisors coerced employees into voting in favor of the Federation. One example of the chicanery witnessed during the balloting took place when a white supervisor ordered his Mexican and black employees to the polling station and oversaw their vote for the Federation.<sup>7</sup> The CIO's challenge began a bitter five year struggle between the two groups to win recognition as the employees' representative with management.

The CIO filed charges with the Labor Board against Humble Oil in 1938 claiming it engaged in an array of unfair labor practices. The charges included that the company illegally helped to establish the Federation as a management shill to fight the CIO, recognized the Federation as the employees' representative, and signed a contract with the Federation following a fraudulent election and firing of CIO

members. In the subsequent Labor Board hearing conducted between March and April 1938, which produced a 3,910 page transcript, dozens of witnesses from both sides gave impassioned testimony creating a contentious atmosphere in the hearing room.<sup>8</sup> When the Labor Board eventually issued its decision a year later in April 1939, it vindicated all the CIO's charges, handing it an unprecedented victory in the refining industry. The Board concluded that management intimidated and discharged CIO members and sympathizers, and that it was instrumental in organizing the Employee Federation as well as dominating it, all violations of the Wagner Act. The Board ordered Humble Oil to withdraw its recognition of the Federation and, most significantly, that the Federation must be disbanded and dissolved.<sup>9</sup> But the admission of guilt, contrition, and penance in response to an upstart union and Labor Board were not part of company or Federation policy.

Humble Oil and the Federation responded to the Board's order by ignoring it and continuing to function as before. Then, they promptly appealed the case to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. In June 1940, the conservative justices of the Fifth Circuit partially exonerated Humble Oil and the Federation by overturning the portion of the Board's ruling that forced the dissolution of the Employee Federation while upholding the rest of the decision. The justices concluded that Humble Oil had broken all its ties and influence over the Federation with the dissolution of the Joint Conference and that it passed muster as a labor union under the Wagner Act.<sup>10</sup> The court handed the CIO a major setback, and the union faced two possibilities: appeal the decision to the Supreme Court and hope for a favorable ruling, an uncertain outcome; or launch another aggressive or-



ganizing campaign and persuade an overwhelming number of employees to join the union, call for a certification election against the Federation, and decisively win it to settle the issue once and for all. The CIO chose the latter and in 1942 launched a new, aggressive organizing campaign. The union had reason to be optimistic about its chances.

Between 1940 and 1942, the CIO successfully organized all the major refineries on the upper Texas Gulf Coast, including Humble Oil's Ingleside Refinery in Corpus Christi. When CIO staffman Clyde Johnson arrived in Baytown in June 1942 to lead the recruiting campaign, he and Humble's CIO members expected a tough fight but believed they would succeed.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, they failed in their mission for three reasons: prosperity returned with the wartime economic boom, the Federation had become entrenched and legitimized by 1942, and the anti-CIO Federationists exploited the race card against the union in Jim Crow Texas.

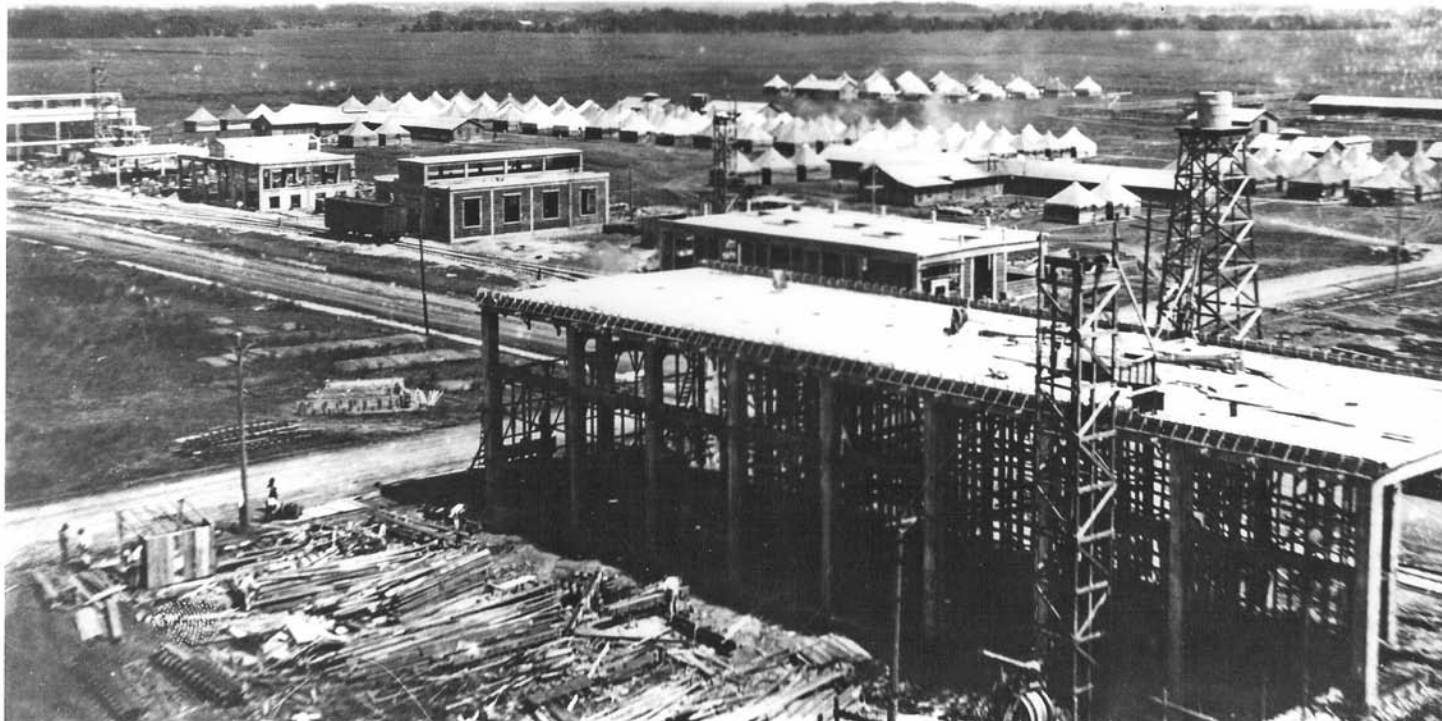
The Federation enthusiastically responded to the CIO's challenge. As part of its tightly orchestrated campaign to discredit the CIO, the Federation periodically issued a series of over one hundred Bulletins that were handbilled outside the refinery gates, distributed at meetings, and, in some instances, sent to Federation members' homes. Laced with inflammatory rhetoric, each issue denounced the CIO as communist, dangerous race levelers, unpatriotic, or a group of outside agitators looking to get rich on Federation members' dues money. Doubtlessly, the most effective issues focused on the CIO's egalitarian racial policies.

Bulletin 9 offered the Federation's unvarnished view of what it regarded as the dangerous racial policies of the union. Its inflammatory rhetoric charged the CIO with, "building up within the negro workers of the Humble Oil Company a sense of false superiority, by promising them absolute equality with all white workers, not only in matters

of wages and hours (which they already have) but socially and economically within the refinery and on the outside as well. They promise them that all forms of racial separation shall be abolished."<sup>12</sup> The Federation issued other racist bulletins pandering to white fears of racial mixing and equality and even suggested that if the CIO triumphed, it would lead to race war in Baytown. The author's identity of the Federation's Bulletins is instructive in getting a sense of the depth and scope of the Federation's and the community's backlash against the CIO. Just prior to the launching of the CIO's 1942 organizing campaign, Humble Oil hired Clifford Bond who was the former publisher of the *Pelly News Tribune*, the local newspaper.

Ostensibly hired to work in the lite-ends department, Bond's primary assignment and responsibility was to head the Federation's public relations department. As such, he served as its publicist and spokesman in all matters of public policy.<sup>13</sup> Bond's anti-CIO bona fides dated back to 1936 when the union first appeared in Baytown. That year Baytown quickly polarized between CIO supporters and opponents. An ardent foe of unions and the CIO in particular, Bond helped found the Tri-Cities Citizens Committee, which was composed of anti-union refinery employees, prominent local businessmen, bankers, and business groups like the Chamber of Commerce to marshal public opinion against the CIO.

Bond's newspaper fiercely condemned the CIO. In the September 16, 1936, edition in a bold, two-column front page story, he vilified then union president Bob Oliver saying, "I have found that a young and ambitious man by the name of Bob Oliver, some three years ago, chose the Tri-Cities area as a fertile field to become a sort of 'Czar, Mussolini, Hitler, or what have you?' among the laboring men of the Tri-Cities.... He was able to rally gullible individ-



Construction of the refinery's mechanical shops, circa 1919. The tent city in the background housed African American and Mexican laborers.

Photo courtesy of the Sterling Library, Baytown, Texas.





*Skilled white machinists and blacksmiths, circa 1928. The African American in the foreground performed unskilled general labor and cleanup for machinists and blacksmiths.*

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

uals in the employ of the Humble Refinery.... I have found that after drawing a fat salary from the dues of the members, Mr. Oliver finally reached a point where it became necessary for him to either 'deliver the goods or get off the receptacle' (if you get what I mean)."<sup>14</sup> With Bond's journalistic background and proven rhetorical and writing skills, it is indeed intriguing that Humble hired him in the midst of the CIO organizing drive and then excused him from his refinery duties to work for the Federation as its publicist.

From the fall of 1942 to the fall of 1943, Bond published well over one hundred Bulletins hammering home the race issue by cautioning white refinery workers and Baytown residents that the CIO was an organization committed to the "absolute equality between the white and colored races," and warned "it will not work in this Southland of ours.... We can prevent real disaster which would be sure to follow a victory by the CIO." He emphasized that, "The CIO already has a large block of votes in the refinery in almost 100% of the Negro workers, whom they [CIO] have blinded with promises of complete social and industrial equality with white people, both men and women."<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Bond reached his rhetorical best when in Bulletin 63 he asserted that, "long ago the CIO entered into a three way agreement in which they were joined by the Communist Party and powerful representatives of the Negro race. This unholy

three has its purpose as the complete control and subjection of the United States after the conclusion of the war."<sup>16</sup>

In his first month as publicist for the Federation, October 1942, Bond published at least eleven Bulletins. In Bulletin 9, Bond unleashed his first racial broadsides against the CIO, and they continued regularly in his Bulletins until November 1943. Its overt racism and challenge to President Roosevelt's executive order banning racial discrimination in defense plants such as the Humble Oil Refinery prompted the CIO to immediately lodge a complaint with the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). Wasting no time in replying, Lawrence Cramer, the executive secretary president of the FEPC, sent a telegram to the Federation that read in part, "In certain parts of this leaflet [Bulletin] is an incitement to violence against Negro workers. Its issuance in a refinery producing essential war materials is an act of gross irresponsibility creating disunity among works and retarding the war effort. The Committee requests in the interests of patriotism and the national war effort that your organization promptly retract this appeal to race prejudice."<sup>17</sup> Embedded in the telegram is the Committee's inherent weakness to stop such outrageous behavior. It could only request that offending organizations stop such behavior because the FEPC did not have the power to enforce its directives.<sup>18</sup>





The Federation refused to acknowledge receipt of Cramer's telegram. In fact, Cramer contacted the Federation twice more, by telegram on October 30, 1942, and in a letter dated February 19, 1943, requesting that the Federation retract Bulletin 9. Bond and the Federation never directly responded to Cramer's pleas; but in Bulletin 12, published just after receipt of the FEPC's first telegram, Bond challenged the CIO's claims to its existence. "It is a lie and that no part of the federal government itself has taken part in this controversy.... There will be no retraction of Bulletin 9 by the Employees' Federation."<sup>19</sup> Bond's bulletins continued making note of race and using it as a weapon against the CIO.

The race issue reached a boiling point in the summer of 1943 in the wake of the race riot that occurred in Beaumont just east of Baytown. On the night of June 15, 1943, Beaumont's white workers, responding to a white woman's allegation that an unidentified black man raped her, dropped their tools and marched on the city's black section. A white mob estimated at 4,000 spent the night setting buildings and automobiles on fire and beating every black person it encountered. Acting quickly, the Texas governor declared martial law, and Texas State Guardsmen and city police restored calm.<sup>20</sup> Explosive racial tensions similar to the ones that caused the Beaumont riot festered in Baytown.

Working-class refinery workers, many of them former

sharecroppers or sons and daughters of sharecroppers, wanted to maintain the social distinctions and racial segregation between themselves and blacks. Additionally, a huge influx of people seeking defense and refinery jobs in the Tri-City areas of Pelly, Goose Creek, and Baytown caused overcrowding and severe housing shortages that threatened to blur the strict segregated lines, which separated whites and blacks in housing and jobs.<sup>21</sup> With the Beaumont Race Riot and all its attendant violence and destruction fresh in their minds, Humble employees and Baytown area residents felt unnerved since the same volatile conditions threatened to explode in their own community. Likely the only thing that kept the lid on violence in Baytown's racially charged atmosphere was the presence of the Texas State National Guard in Beaumont and the threat of its deployment in the event of racial violence in Baytown.

Mexican workers in Humble's Baytown refinery also found themselves sucked into the vortex of the racial maelstrom surrounding the union battle. They suffered racism that by degree was worse than blacks faced when factoring in the added ingredient of xenophobia. Humble Oil eliminated hiring Mexicans in 1937; but the approximately seventy-five Mexicans remaining on Humble Oil's payroll by 1942 were restricted to the unskilled general labor gang without any opportunity for advancement. They toiled at the most unpleasant, physically demanding, and often dangerous



tasks. In those rare instances when they held jobs relatively comparable to Anglos, they received lower pay than Anglos doing the same work. Management justified its non-hiring of Mexicans and discrimination against those remaining based on language. The company asserted that they spoke English poorly or not at all, and their limited education disqualified them from promotions.<sup>22</sup> Refinery superintendent Gordon Farned candidly summed up the company's and Anglo's racial attitude toward Mexican employees in an FEPC report on job discrimination in the refinery, "It is an undeniable fact that the Anglo American workman and the public generally, exclusive of the Mexican[s] themselves, do consider themselves to be superior mentally, physically and socially to the Mexicans."<sup>23</sup>

Regarding attempts by Mexicans or the CIO's efforts to uplift Mexicans, Farned rolled out the reliable scare tactic that it "would most certainly start serious hostilities [with Anglos] and lead to a harmful conflagration."<sup>24</sup> Promoting the notion of race war as a reason for keeping racial discrimination and xenophobia in place helped serve the company's economic purposes by securing a cheap supply of readily exploitable unskilled black and Mexican labor. Naturally, Humble Oil never admitted to this.

In subsequent complaints brought by Mexican employees through the FEPC, the company's official position for denying Mexicans parity with white employees was the fear of a community backlash against the company with potentially disastrous implications for refining operations. Management did state that it would eliminate its barriers to Mexicans if all the refineries on the upper Texas Coast were willing to do the same. This of course never happened since none of the refineries on the upper Texas Gulf Coast were willing to grant Mexicans parity. The CIO embraced the Mexican cause at Humble Oil, but it was not enough to help break the bonds of discrimination they suffered.<sup>25</sup>

In the course of the CIO's organizing campaign that stretched from June 1942 through November 1943, it twice filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board against Humble Oil and the Baytown Employee Federation. The first charge in 1942 accused the company's white foremen over the black labor gangs of intimidating and harassing their employees for joining the CIO. The Federation accused foremen sympathetic to the CIO of the same thing. In December 1942, the Labor Board conducted a hearing in Baytown and ultimately ordered the company to stop its front line supervisors from harassing union members.<sup>26</sup>


The other case brought in 1943 addressed the issue of who would be eligible to cast ballots in the union certification election between the Employee Federation and the CIO. The CIO contented that only those paid hourly wages and working directly in the refinery in jobs requiring physical labor be allowed to vote. The Federation agreed that those employees should be included but also put forth that the clerical, technical, and professional staff, where the Federation enjoyed widespread support, be included in the balloting. The CIO opposed their inclusion claiming that they were rightly considered management since they were salaried and not hourly personnel. In addition, the International Association of Machinists, International Brotherhood of Electricians, and Brotherhood of Railroad

Trainmen all joined in the case, arguing that they held jurisdiction over their members.

When the Labor Board finally sorted out the competing jurisdictional claims, it accepted the CIO's argument based on precedent that salaried employees are considered supervisory personnel and ineligible to cast ballots in a union certification election. The Board approved ballot included the CIO, Employees Federation, machinists, electricians, and trainmen's unions.<sup>27</sup> The looming union certification election that the Board supervised in November 1943 would be a watershed event in the history of Humble Oil & Refining Company regardless of the outcome.

Unions had now become part of Humble Oil's culture, and when considering the company's historical hostility to labor unions, it demonstrated a strong innate desire among its employees for a voice over their occupational affairs through organization. Employees expected a union to aggressively advocate for them over wages; but, perhaps more importantly, they wanted that organization to protect the two most important things for blue collar Americans: a steady, secure job coupled with respect.<sup>28</sup> In November 1943, Humble's employees went to the polls and overwhelmingly chose the Employees Federation as the organization that would win them the things they cherished most.<sup>29</sup>

Following their disappointing defeat, CIO loyalists remained committed to their union, though it had no official standing in the refinery. Some maintained their membership while they joined the Federation. Following World War II, unsettling changes for employees began to slowly take shape. The refining industry began seeking greater economies of scale and the way to do that was through new labor saving technology. Though refinery workers enjoyed some of the highest wages in industrial America, the number of jobs rapidly declined, and job security quickly became as important as wages, if not more so. By 1959, the hourly workforce at Humble Oil's Baytown refinery had shrunk considerably from its wartime peak.<sup>30</sup>

Employees became increasingly concerned as the Baytown Employee Federation seemed powerless to preserve the things they valued most, their jobs and security. By this time the old CIO oil workers union had become the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), and loomed in the background. Going back to the 1930s, the CIO and now its successor, the OCAW, had a hard core group of supporters who still worked in the refinery and remained loyal to their union. In 1959, acting on the growing discontent over job losses and demotions, the OCAW seized the moment. Acting on employee fears, it aggressively recruited. Disillusioned Federationists, black employees, and OCAW loyalists combined together to defeat the Employee Federation in a union certification election.<sup>31</sup> Unionization at Humble Oil & Refining had come full circle. 

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# Witness to the Day of Reckoning: *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill, March 24, 1989

*A Conversation with  
Bob Nicholas and  
Jason Theriot*



*Exxon Valdez aground on Bligh Reef, Prince William Sound, Alaska, and leaking oil, 1989.*

Photo courtesy of Bob Nicholas.

**O**n March 24, 1989, the U.S. oil industry encountered a day of reckoning. Just after midnight, the *Exxon Valdez* supertanker carrying Alaskan crude to California ran aground on Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling nearly eleven million gallons of oil into one of the nation's most beautiful coastal habitats. At the time, this was the largest oil spill in history in American waters.

Although it occurred thousands of miles away from Houston, this disaster had strong connections to our region. Exxon USA, headquartered in downtown Houston, was the Exxon subsidiary responsible for the *Exxon Valdez*. In the days just after the spill, numerous Exxon USA employees were summoned to Alaska to join the company's effort to get the spill under control.

On the morning after the spill, Bob Nicholas, a Port Arthur, Texas, native and General Counsel for Exxon Shipping Company, received an urgent telephone call at his Houston home. Within hours, he and a crew of Exxon representatives flew to Valdez, Alaska, to respond to this disaster. Before the end of the day, he was on board the *Exxon Valdez*, which was still aground on Bligh Reef.

In the wake of the *Valdez* tragedy, Congress passed its most stringent oil pollution legislation of the twentieth century: the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA-90). In this issue of the *Houston History* magazine, Mr. Nicholas, who has practiced maritime law in Houston for nearly thirty years, shares his personal experience in this historic event and discusses the impact of the OPA 90 legislation on the Houston Ship Channel and Galveston Bay.



**JASON THERIOT (JT):** What was your immediate reaction to the telephone call that you received on March 24, 1989?

**BOB NICHOLAS (BN):** I remember I was about to leave my house. It was Good Friday. It was a holiday, and I was on my way down to my sailboat. I was just packing stuff in the car, and my wife came out and said, "There is a phone call from Captain Bill Duncan."... The first thing I heard was that the *Exxon Valdez* had run aground in Prince William Sound and that I needed to get to Intercontinental Airport to meet at the Exxon terminal as soon as possible.



*Retired from ExxonMobil (1998), Bob Nicholas currently practices Admiralty and Maritime law with the firm of Phelps Dunbar in Houston, Texas.*

Photo courtesy of Bob Nicholas.

That's where the group was gathering to fly up to Valdez.

It was kind of funny—I remembered one of the things I packed was a suit, anticipating that I might have to go to some kind of Coast Guard hearing. Everything I did was based upon the routine that I had been doing for many years in responding to a marine casualty. As it turned out, though, the reality and the magnitude of *Valdez* was totally different. It was a completely different

experience from anything I had ever been involved with in connection with a marine casualty. This was brought about because of the huge media blitz and the large amount of oil that was spilled. This was a major environmental event and not just another ship casualty. The fact that it was a huge environmental event dictated the type of response.... [T]he response was more aimed at the containment and clean up efforts. The salvage of the ship and what happened to the ship afterwards was of little consequence at the time, given the magnitude of the oil spill.

When we got into Prince William Sound, I can remember we flew over the ship, and the oil at that time was one huge slick that you could see out in the middle of Prince William Sound. This was before it had dispersed and was blown all over the place by the heavy weather that occurred two days later. We landed there some time, I guess, between three and four in the afternoon local time. At the airport, we were met by Captain Bill Deppe. I was asked by Frank Iarossi, president of Exxon Shipping Company, to take him out to the ship and relieve Captain Joe Hazelwood and find out what happened. We went out to the ship on a small fishing boat. It took several hours, and we didn't arrive until after dark. The ship was still lit up. The water was very calm out there at the time. There were floating pieces of ice all over the place. In fact, as we approached the ship, the person piloting the small boat that we were on turned on a spotlight to pick our way through the ice pieces. When we were about halfway there, the light burned out. All I could



*High-pressure steam-cleaning the beaches of Prince William Sound.*

Photo courtesy of Charles Ehler/National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

remember thinking was, "Oh boy, it is going to be fun going back. We are going to have to go back through all this ice in the dark." When [we] got to the ship and got on board, I met with the Captain Hazelwood and the third mate, [Gregory T.] Cousins, who was the actual mate on watch at the time of the grounding. I spent some time with them talking to them about what had happened. I wanted to get a rough thumbnail sketch of what their remembrance was of the events before and after the grounding. After speaking with them, I went about gathering documents.

**JT:** You mentioned that Prince William Sound is very, very dark at night. With all your years of experience as a maritime attorney and the life experiences that you bring, were you getting a sense of how dark and spooky, and how the weather played a factor in all of this?

**BN:** Oh, no question about it.... When you get to a place like Prince William Sound and there are mountains all around, and there are no large population centers, you don't have any huge concentrations of light being reflected off the cloud layer. There was still a lot of snow around, so you did get some light, but in the absence of light there is nothing to be reflected. It is extremely dark. It was very, very dark out there that night. When we finally saw the ship, it was all lit up, just ablaze with lights, because it was the only light source out there. But yes, I can imagine going through there, and it being that dark, especially if you have cloud cover. And it was kind of cloudy. In fact, I don't remember very many clear nights while I was there in Valdez.

**JT:** What occurred in those thirty minutes when the ship actually maneuvered off course to avoid the icebergs?

**BN:** They [*Valdez* crew] had gotten some information from a ship that had left earlier that there was a considerable amount of ice in the traffic lanes. Prince William Sound has a traffic separation scheme in place.... If you look at a navigation chart of the area, you will see there are designated



lanes for inbound and outbound traffic. In the separation scheme, there is a zone between the two, the south and northbound lanes. They were outbound, of course, in the southbound lane.... They requested permission [from the Coast Guard area vessel traffic service] to leave the lane to go around some ice, and as I was told by Captain Hazelwood, he had instructed the mate [Cousins] on watch before he left the bridge to turn back into the traffic lanes when they got abeam of, or directly adjacent to, Busby Island Light. Busby Island Light is on a little rock protrusion sticking up where they have installed a navigation aid that blinks at night. At that point, Cousins was supposed to turn back into the traffic lanes.

I noticed from looking at the chart, a piece of the chart that I had copied that was being used that night, there was a position marked just inside the southbound lane. The next position was marked at a point almost due south, 180 degrees from the earlier position. There was another position marked on the chart directly abeam of or adjacent to Busby Island Light. While this point was marked on the chart, you can look further south and see the point of impact on the area nearby Bligh Reef. Bligh Reef is shown on the chart as a reef, but it is really just shallow water with lots of rocks.... There is a navigation light that marks the reef. If you were southbound in the direction they were headed, the light would have appeared off their starboard bow or off to the right of the forward part of the ship. Actually, the lookout, the person sailing who happened to be a third mate, reported the light on the starboard side; but for some reason the ship did not begin to turn until it was too far south and in the vicinity of the shallow water where it actually went aground. It is interesting to note that in looking at the course recorder—which is a paper roll recording device that is attached to the ship that operates off of and takes signals from the ship's gyrocompass—in my mind, it indicated that the ship was about ten minutes on autopilot. The mate on watch at the time indicated that they had taken it off autopilot and had started to turn, but obviously the ship did not turn at the anticipated location. Obviously, it went aground. The facts are as they are. The ship did not turn, and it did not go back into the traffic lanes when they were abeam off Busby Island Light. I have often wondered about that ten minute segment of time, and what actually happened. With respect to whether they were able to disengage or thought they had disengaged the autopilot, all of these things have been speculated on by those involved, including me.

**JT:** What damage did you see in the flyover?

**BN:** You could see the spill, but it was massive. What I remember about the oil slick and how massive it was.... There was a small vessel that looked like it was attempting to string out some boom, but the oil slick was a thousand times larger. It looked like a toy on one end with a little string of boom, and here is this massive slick, which extended out several miles away from the vessel. To surround the spill, they would have had to have a thousand times more boom. This is my guess. It is what I thought when we were flying over and looking down at the oil. It would have required a lot more boom than was out there to actually surround this huge massive slick.

**JT:** What was the mood of the locals, of the media, and of the people involved with Exxon?

**BN:** The media was very hostile. It was difficult to do your job sometimes.

**JT:** Had anything in your previous experience prepared you for those fifteen days up there? Did you feel that you were prepared well enough?

**BN:** You just did the best you could. The worst problem you had was trying to stay focused on your job. Things were constantly changing. You had to do stuff so rapidly and so quickly, and not being able to get any sleep made it worse. We all went for days with little or no sleep. I don't think I ever stayed up twenty-four hours, but I know I was up those first few days probably a good twenty hours a day or more. It takes its toll on you after a while. I saw people walking around like zombies, barely able to function after that length of time. The constant bombardment of requests to do this, do that, as quickly as possible made the stress unbelievable.

For me it was a tough fifteen days, but it was really only the beginning. After we got back—all the work we had to do and things that had to be done were overwhelming. It was very, very stressful for a very long time.

**JT:** Was the U.S. prepared for an oil spill the size of the *Exxon Valdez*?

**BN:** The answer is obviously no—from the documents that came out after the spill and for many years later it was clear no one was ready for such a massive spill. Even before *Valdez* happened, there were a number of things, I think that pointed to the fact that the answer would be no. First of all, there had never been a spill of that magnitude in the U.S. There were larger spills but the spills had not occurred in the U.S. Even the spill involving the *Torrey Canyon* back in 1967 was not this large. Only the *Amoco Cadiz* spill off the coast of France could rival the *Valdez* spill. Of course, the ships were not as large either, and that makes the difference. There was a very large spill from a Shell vessel down in the Strait of Magellan ... larger than the *Exxon Valdez* spill ... Unfortunately, it did occur in a pristine environmental area, but it was so far removed from civilization it did not



*Oil skimming operations in Prince William Sound.*

Photo courtesy of Charles Ehler/National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

get the press. Also, I doubt if there was any clean up or any response available at all. At that time, they probably just let nature take care of it.

With the *Valdez*, all of the spill response planning was for a much smaller spill than the *Exxon Valdez* spill. There were no regulatory requirements that required the level of spill response capability that would have been needed. There were some resources available; but what actually happened was in order to cope with a spill of that magnitude, Exxon had to gear up to actually handle the volume of the spill by flying in massive amounts of equipment. Just mobilizing for the cleanup required a massive transportation effort to move all the spill response equipment—skimmers, boom, all types of spill response equipment, including people. Alaska's population is small—the population of Valdez could not have handled the problem. The Alaska resources that were mobilized were primarily fishing boats that were used to take equipment and people out to the response areas. But yes, definitely this was not a situation where the country was prepared. I think even the Coast Guard commented, if it had to be anybody, they were glad it was Exxon because of their vast financial resources and their ability to respond, given the magnitude of the spill. No one else could have responded in a very large way. What people do not realize, in spite of the litigation and the lawsuits and everything else—Exxon spent about \$4 billion up there just on cleanup efforts, \$4 billion. [In addition, although the *Valdez* lost about 250,000 barrels of oil, lightering ships were able to transfer about 1,000,000 barrels of oil off the *Valdez* be-

fore the tanker was moved south for repairs in California.]

There is no question in my mind this event was absolutely a hundred percent preventable. You had one person involved in creating an error chain, and no procedures in place to prevent that error chain from being broken. Procedures were in place, but as was learned, they needed to be more effective. You are going to have plane crashes, you are going to have whatever kinds of casualties, ship collisions, ship groundings, because you've got one person up there doing everything; and if they make a mistake, and that mistake is not caught by somebody else, ... that is what can happen.

After *Valdez*, Exxon Shipping began a training program referred to as “bridge team training” with the idea in mind of having more than one person involved in the navigation process. Coast Guard regulations now require—that was one of the things that came out in OPA 90 [Oil Pollution Act of 1990]—that you have to have more than one navigation officer on the bridge of the ship when you are in Prince William Sound and in other areas.

**JT:** How did OPA differ from previous laws, and why had Congress waited so long to pass effective legislation?

**BN:** I think the magnitude of the spill was the driving force behind the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and its amendments. I say “amendments”—the Oil Pollution Act of 1990—if you look at it, it is as a series of amendments to a large number of existing statutory provisions that were already in effect. The main liability provisions, the proof



*Exxon Valdez transferring crude to the lightering ship, Exxon Baton Rouge, Prince William Sound, Alaska, 1989.*

Photo courtesy of Bob Nicholas.



of financial responsibility requirements, and the limits of liability, those are all amendments to the Clean Water Act or Federal Water Pollution Control Act. The amendments dealing with double hulls, with manning and work hours requirements, drug testing, and all those things, those are amendments to existing Coast Guard statutes and regulations that deal with tank vessels specifically, and with the manning statutes that the Coast Guard oversees. Also effected were the licensing requirements and licensing statutes that the Coast Guard administers for the licensing of American merchant mariners; all these changes were statutory amendments to existing legislation. There was part of the act which consolidated all of [the] federal oil spill liability funds in existence at the time. This included the TransAlaska Pipeline Authorization Act as well as the Deep Water Ports Act Fund, the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act Fund, and whatever else all got consolidated in this one Oil Pollution Liability Fund, federal fund....

As you well know, most of the vessels that call into U.S. ports bring most of the crude oil into the U.S. The only exceptions are the few U.S. flagships that move Alaskan oils to the lower forty-eight states. The vast majority of these ships are foreign owned; and being foreign owned, if the owner of such a vessel has no assets in the United States and does not reside in the United States and has a *Valdez*-type event, spilling eleven million gallons or twenty million gallons, that ship owner's limitation of liability is going to be de facto. You are not going to have unlimited liability against this vessel owner. He may be exposing his billion dollars worth of insurance or whatever it is the vessel owner carries, but in order for that insurance to be exposed, the vessel owner will have to have some presence in the U.S. in order for the full impact of the OPA 90 liability provisions to apply. That vessel owner, if you can't reach him here in the United States, [and] you can't get personal jurisdiction over him, you are only going to have jurisdiction over the ship through an admiralty process called "in rem" jurisdiction, which gives the court actual jurisdiction over the property of the vessel itself but not the owner personally. And if the owner never appears, you can't get personal service over the owner; the ship, or what's left of it. Liability insurance is going to be all you will get ... There is not going to be these billions of dollars paid out by some U.S. owned oil company.


The other thing that has happened, too, is there have been a lot of technological developments that occurred afterwards where people have developed better dispersants. There are some products now that have been used in Galveston Bay, and what is great about it ... [is] they spray this material, which consists of bacteria, or microbes or whatever, that actually eat the oil. What is really good about this product is that if you have a spill in a marsh area, you don't have to go in there and really disrupt the habitat. I've seen them using it in the upper parts of Galveston Bay. They just run along the shore line and spray this stuff all the way up to the tide line. It also works better in warmer water. When you go back in a few months, you can't tell that there was ever any oil in there. It is amazing how well this stuff works. New technology is definitely on the plus side.

The big thing though is with ... the emphasis on pollution. Given the potential for liability and the massive costs

that can be involved, if you are an American flag operator, basically, you bet your company every time you put a vessel to sea because of the potential cost involved in a massive spill, the clean up cost efforts, and liability. So, whatever efforts directed towards prevention ... and the number of and size of spills has resulted in a real benefit to the environment. It doesn't mean that something is not likely to happen sooner or later because there are people that always like to cut corners.

Having been connected with the tanker shipping business for more years than I would like to remember now—well over thirty years—I think this is probably true of shipping in general, people who ship goods don't like to pay a lot of money for the transportation.... People don't want to buy double protection. They don't care. They want the cheapest way you can get it there, and I think that is an unfortunate reality we have to contend with in the shipping business. The only way you can get around this is you've got to have governments coming together to pass legislation so there is a level playing field and this is the standard....

**JT:** That telephone call that you received, how did that change your life?

**BN:** Oh, man, I'm telling you. It is one of these events that is a career changing, or life changing; that's the way it happened to me anyway.... There was my life before it and my life afterwards, and it changed quite a bit. Most of all it changed the way I look at things that happen in my life day to day. You get to the point where the small problems that you encounter on a daily basis don't mean a whole lot to you anymore. They all pale in significance to the kinds of things that you see happening when you are part of something like this. However, what I will never forget is working with the people that I had grown up with at Exxon, and how hard those people, especially the crew on the ship who worked to save it—they wouldn't get off that ship. You couldn't have pried them off there or ordered them off. They wanted to do whatever they could to save that ship, to salvage it and get it out of there. And they did. I mean, people were working themselves to death up there, very little sleep, working around the clock, a lot of men and women with a lot of courage, a lot of guts. Those people will never be recognized. Exxon and everybody associated with Exxon will always be looked at as the villains in this particular incident. But, for me, if I have any feelings at all that I will always remember, it will be the great sense of pride that I was able to work with these people and be there for them the best I could be. And I miss that. I really miss being away from the ships and the people. Of course, I am old enough now where I don't particularly want to be climbing around some ship or barge in the middle of the night anymore. I did my time doing that. But those were a great bunch of folks and still are. God bless them all. 

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# Recalling Houston's Early Days and Its Oilmen:

## *A Conversation with Jane Blaffer Owen and Elizabeth Gregory, Joe Pratt, and Melissa Keane*

*Jane Blaffer Owen, an arts patron, social activist, and preservationist, was the daughter of Robert Lee Blaffer, one of the founders of Humble Oil & Refining Company (now ExxonMobil), and the granddaughter of William T. Campbell, who established the The Texas Company, which became Texaco. She was born on April 18, 1915, and grew up in the family home at 6 Sunset Boulevard in Houston. She attended the Kinkaid School, and graduated from the Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, Connecticut. She studied at Bryn Mawr College and Union Theological Seminary. In 1941, she married Kenneth Owen, a descendant of New Harmony Utopian Society founder Robert Owen.*

*Recognized for her philanthropy in both Houston, Texas, and New Harmony, Indiana, Blaffer Owen was a life-long supporter of the University of Houston's Blaffer Art Museum and a patron of the Moores School of Music and College of Architecture. She received many awards and honorary degrees over the years. In 2009, Jane Blaffer Owen achieved the highest honor given by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Crowninshield Award. Although dividing her time between Houston and New Harmony, a historic town founded by her father-in-law as a utopian community, Blaffer Owen served as the first president of Allied Arts Council, as an early organizer of the Seamen's Center, as a trustee of the C. G. Jung Education Center, and as a board member of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation—demonstrating her community activism in the Bayou City. Jane Blaffer Owen died on June 21, 2010, at the age of ninety-five.<sup>1</sup>*

*Jane Blaffer Owen's reflections that follow are derived from two oral histories. The first was conducted by Joe Pratt and Elizabeth Gregory of the University of Houston on May 3, 2006, and the second by Melissa Keane for the Bill White City of Houston Oral History Project on March 27, 2008. We have attributed quotations to their respective interviews in the endnotes.*

### *Early Life: Reflections on Houston*

If you can believe it, Bissonnett was a series of farms with cows and horses on those farms. Where the art museum now stands was a field of blackberries and buttercups.... J. S. Cullinan, bless his heart, developed Shadyside as one of the early residential sections, and it was far out ... It seemed remote. Mother ... was a great believer in candle light in the evening. Our house was described by some friends abroad as being so remote in the country that electricity had not yet reached [it.] ... When Daddy and Mommy were married, Will Hogg gave them a cow. Not many people give cows for wedding gifts, but Will Hogg did. They called it Wedding Bells, and he was always belled. At Shadyside, there were extra lots. As the houses were built, there would be less lots until finally—Wedding Bells the 7th because we kept having bells, wedding bells ringing all the time, one after another—Daddy came home one night and said, "Sadie, my dear, the last lot has been sold for a house. There will be no pasture for Wedding Bells, therefore, we will just have to

*As a young girl, Jane Blaffer Owen appreciated the rural nature of Houston prior to the growth of the city. As an adult, she transferred this appreciation into preserving New Harmony, Indiana, a utopian community founded by her father-in-law.*

Photo from the University of Houston People Collection, courtesy of UH Digital Library, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston.





give her up.” It was a very sad day for the Blaffers when we couldn’t have our fresh milk at Shadyside....

[It] was a great Sunday afternoon when daddy would take us for a ride on the trolley car on Bellaire Boulevard. That was remote. There was a wonderful conductor that always looked for us—a lovely man.... There was a funny little shack of a store called the Owl on Main Street across from the main entrance of Rice. If my sisters and brother and I finished our homework early enough, Daddy would take us for a walk to the Owl to have an ice cream cone. But it supplied the students with their snacks. That has long since gone.

[In the 1920s,] Buffalo Speedway was a buffalo trail and a wonderful Saturday would be when my father and I would drive to Green Pastures, which is where the Container Store now sits. Green Pastures was a lovely polo field, Houston’s polo club. Then an attorney for the Gulf Oil Company called John Green, a lovely citizen, and his wife, they bought it for their horses and the horses that belonged to their friends. So, daddy and I kept our horses [Nellie and Prince] on Green Pastures and would park our car there and ride down Buffalo Speedway, which was a trail, to Mother’s house for lunch. It took us three or four hours to do that, and we really felt [like] pioneers. Then, we’d of course pop back to Green Pastures on the corner of Westheimer and Post Oak.<sup>2</sup>

## The Blaffer home on Sunset Boulevard stood across the street from the entrance to Rice Institute, and Owen enjoyed visiting the grounds.

I used to take my baby carriage and wheel it down that avenue of oak trees leading to [Rice’s] Lovett Hall. On the way, I would pass these little frogs in wire cages, and I learned, to my chagrin, that they were destined for dissection in the chemistry and biology laboratories. Now today, I imagine they still experiment with frogs, but they are not anywhere to be seen....

No traffic. There were islands of trees in the middle of the street. We were the second house. J. S. Cullinan built the first house at Shadyside, a large red brick house ... There were many pastures for mother and daddy’s cows to graze. We would hear the [cow] bells come in at night and the cow bells going out in the morning. It was very rural.... The Warwick Hotel had not been built....

Mrs. Hobby tore down that beautiful Cullinan house. It should have been part of the museum.... It looked like an old English Manor house. We all loved Mr. Cullinan because, first of all, he was so handsome. He was a very tall Irishman but thick white hair, a mustache ... My sisters and I would compete as to who was to pick a bunch of violets to take to Uncle Joe for his birthday. He was quite a figure.<sup>3</sup>

We all knew each other intimately in Shadyside, and also on Lovett Boulevard and Courtland Place. What happened to them good or bad, we’d know right away. It was more of a community.<sup>4</sup>

In those days, people had large houses; they... [had] thick

hedges or covered them with fig ivy. Mommy and Daddy said anyone that couldn’t afford a big house would not look enviously at you.... You could hardly see our house. While I applaud the great advances in the arts and in the Medical Center, which is probably the most impressive, finest one in the country—very proud of that—we have lost a great deal. People now are cutting down their trees in front of their mega houses so people can see how rich they are. That wasn’t the Houston I was growing up in. In Houston, people who had wealth, they were modest about it, and they did not show off their houses.

Daddy called River Oaks, even in the days when he was still with us, “a light bulb contest.” It is even more so now. People look like nightclubs, their houses.... See, no zoning. Anyone can do anything. That is the Wild West. One man, one horse. If I want to have my leaf blower all day long, I can jolly well have it all day long. And Sundays, too.

Of course in those days, we could all have our private cooks. We didn’t. Mother thought only older people had to cater their dinner party because there were enough wonderful black people to go around. We did not think of them as servants—they were part of the family. If I kept having babies, they would be in the kitchen. It was the southern way of life....

Along the golden circle of Post Oak Boulevard, there was nothing but little truck farms. Mexicans growing vegetables. We had a Mexican gardener called Angelo who lived on that golden circle and sometimes bought us vegetables. [Houston changed] at a run. At a gallop.... It happened. Gallop is the right word. I can hear hoof beats, galloping hoof beats. My chief desire became to live in the country. When I married my husband in 1941, he took me to this little village, [New Harmony,] and it became the focus of my life for sixty-seven years....

## Early Oil Men

Houston has always had the two elements: the Wild West and the South. My father’s partner for thirty years, Will Farish, the firm was called Blaffer and Farish before they became part of Humble [Oil & Refining Company]. Their families had both been ruined in the Civil War, but they brought their culture with them. Then, there was the Wild West element ... that still exists here.<sup>6</sup>

Daddy and Mommy never wanted the control of Humble Company to be in the East. In fact, Mother held out some shares that she would not give up. Daddy wanted the control to be here, not in New York. Speaking of companies, my grandmother Campbell was the first lady stockholder of the Texas Company because her husband died before the other partners; and she was in charge of the stock, which she fought for. She said, “These ... lawyers, they want to handle it for me but, Jane, they are crooked as corkscrews, and they couldn’t sleep straight in bed!” And I held on; I held on to my Texas Company [stock] because I wanted to educate my children with that Texas Company stock.

The reason it went to New York was that the bankers, the timid bankers in those days, would not make loans to oil companies. It was too risky for them. So, Joe Cullinan and the others went to New York, ... and it was financed from

New York in the early days.... The East Coast took charge of the Texas Company. Dear Mo-Mo, [which is what] we call my grandmother, she didn't like the way everything went, so she went up there to the stockholders meeting to give them a piece of her mind. They were so impressed with Mrs. Campbell that they put her picture on a folder. I still have that folder. Dear Mo-Mo, first lady of the Texas Company. She would take no nonsense from New York or Washington, but we take a lot of nonsense from Washington these days. That is just an aside. But there was that spirit of independence of the women and the men both. It could be overdone, I know that. You could be 101% Texan, which I think is a bore....

My blessed Daddy died in 1942, but he had taught me about Robert Owen because he greatly admired the labor reforms that [he] went ahead and instituted in New Atlantic, Scotland. He cut down the hours for child labor. He gave their parents better wages, better housing and it was phenomenal in that period of history when the poor were expendable. The children didn't live very long because they were so tiny, they could fit under these machines in the cotton mills and drag coal cars in the coal mills. They were all expendable. So, Robert Peele passed the first child labor laws in England to put an end to the abuse. Well, that didn't end it. Evil will always pop up its head again, but they made a great improvement in the labor conditions; and he founded the first trade unions so that the labor voice could be heard. Daddy was all for that.

He founded the first stock plan in Houston so that employees would own stock in the company for which they worked. After that, he died. So many people called me and said, "We are so grateful to your father because the stock has gone up, and we were able to buy a better house and educate our children with what your father insisted that we possess." Think of Enron today. The opposite. These were the opposite. These were not Houstonians. I don't know where they came from. We won't go into that, but he couldn't have thought ever a greater contrast between those early businessmen here and their companies and, of course, taking a page from Robert Owen. The contrast. Whenever I go anywhere in the East or abroad, they say, "Tell us about Enron." That is the face that they put upon Houston.<sup>7</sup>...

My beloved daughter [wrote an article for the *Houston Chronicle*,] I applauded every word she wrote. The Rockefeller family, I have learned today [March 27, 2008] through an attorney friend who had read the article and said the Rockefellers are coming out with the same position; that there should be a separation between the chairman and the president; and the outrageous salaries, while people are dying, and dying of early cancer near the refineries. With all these tremendous profits that they are making, couldn't they put something aside to relocate some of the people who are living in cancer polluted areas?

When my father and Will Farish were alive, and the Cullinans, there was absolutely no connection between cancer and refineries. That was not an issue. And if it had been, those fine men would have done something about it because they were humanitarians as well as businessmen. So, Janie [my daughter,] is speaking for my dead father. He would have applauded every word she wrote.

## Culture and the University Communities

There are different strains of culture. Rice was the first university and it was an island of culture, stability....

A. E. Russell, the Irish poet, and also editor of the *Irish Statesman*, an agriculture magazine, I remember him so well walking the sidewalks of Shadyside. He would ... draw landscapes of Ireland on the sidewalk in charcoal and [tell] stories about the Celtic race. I was fascinated. The Cullinans, very close friends of my parents, would bring their distinguished Irish guests to dinner, and I would listen in. It was a little nucleus of culture and civility....

[At Rice] you could sit in on wonderful courses whether you were a student or not. Daddy, of course was a trustee for many years. I was welcomed. There was good music. There was opera already in Houston. Mrs. Lovett began Houston Opera, and Ima Hogg, she started the symphony. It was all burgeoning. But the only university was Rice.... Our table was fed with wonderful people from across the street [at Rice.]...



*Jane Blaffer Owen fondly remembers Uncle Roy and Aunt Lillie (Cullen) as philanthropists who personally guaranteed that "a university would rise on their land." Over the years, the Cullen family has donated nearly \$70 million to the University of Houston and the UH System to ensure an education for those who could not afford Rice University.*

Photo from University of Houston People Collection, courtesy UH Digital Library, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

Right now, I am working with the University of Houston in Harmony Park designed by Frederick Kiesler, the great architect with whom I worked ... It is going to be sort of an oasis for the busy students at U of H. And the reason I am involved now more with U of H—Mommy and Daddy were great friends of the Cullens. Uncle Roy, as we called him, wanted desperately to be a member of Rice, ... and they turned him down.... In the end, Houston has benefitted....

He [Roy Cullen] was determined to do something for those who couldn't afford Rice. He was a real humanitar-



ian, and we loved them both. I will never forget when they lost their only son on an oil rig, the source of their wealth was the source of their greatest sorrow. We were on the Mediterranean that summer, and we had a cable—we didn't telephone so much, there were cables—they wanted to be with Mommy and Daddy. So, we spent several months together ... He was undefeatable....



*Blaffer Owen donated The Winged Victory statue in honor of the friendship between the Blaffers and the Cullens. The statue is situated in the Jane Blaffer Owen Plaza in front of the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston.*

Photo by Aimee L'Heureux.

[In the] early 1970s, ... [the University of Houston was] interested more in art than Rice. Pat Nicholson obtained a concession from Austin to do a certain percentage of all the money from the University to go into sculpture. Some very important sculptures [are] there.... Mother felt that they were more interested in art ... They had a burgeoning art department. It was just crying aloud for a gallery. Mother felt that art belonged, first of all, where young people could see it; and then, from the University, then go on further to the Museum, but so many of these students had never seen art.

I remember one of the letters received thanking the Foundation for a traveling exhibit because Mother wanted art to travel around Texas, especially the places that had no

museums. The majority of the letter said we [the senders] felt we would never be in the same room with something 500 years old because this little town was fifty years old. The age of something impressed them. It was not that Mother didn't like Rice, it was just the circumstances and her friendship with the Cullens, and having the burgeoning art there....

While Daddy was trustee, he helped towards that endowment from oil interests. I think some oil properties were given to Rice.... I remember Daddy talking about that. So, that was a very natural alliance and a needed one. Not only a natural, but essential to the development of this whole area. It all made sense. It was less so when the University of Houston started. I think Uncle Roy wanted many professions open to young people...

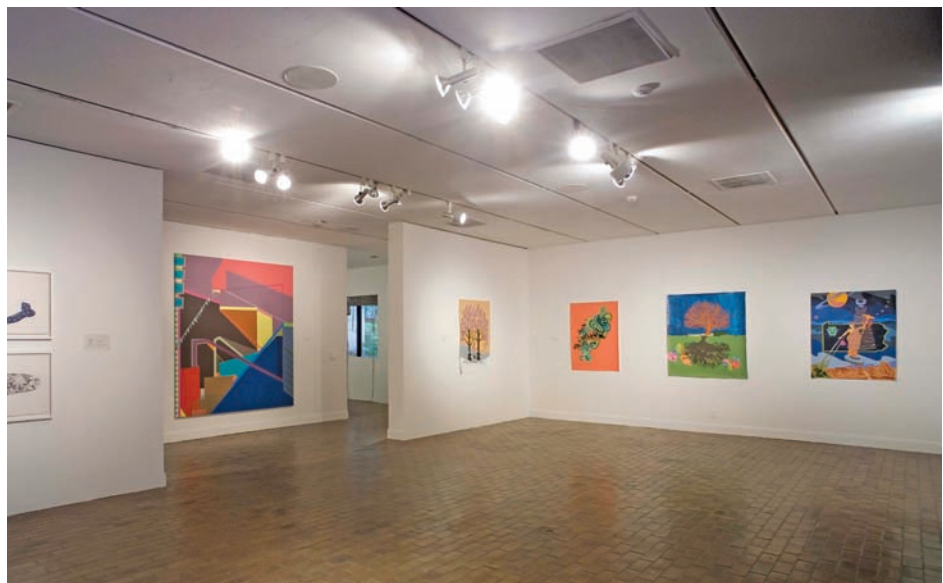
## *Philanthropy and the Spirit of Houston*

I have a picture of Uncle Will [Clayton] and Daddy at the Port of Houston ... One out of every three dollars came out of the Port of Houston to open our ditch to the sea. It was extremely important. Daddy and Mommy were very interested in building a seaman center, which they did not live to complete, but [for] which I took the torch from them, and I helped start the seaman center.... These sailors, many cynics say, all they want is a warehouse and a bar. That is not true. They are educated young people, and they play chess now in the center that we have, and they telephone their families. They use the chapel, which I am very moved that they named for me because I had a lot to do with the chapel there. The first Christmas Eve that I spent worshipping there, they had to have three different services to accommodate all the seamen that wanted to pray....

It is a "can do" spirit that I think is still here [in Houston]. But you can do the right things, and you can do the wrong things. I think the Rice and the University of Houston and St. Thomas—I love St. Thomas—are all examples of the "can do" and the right spirit. The Medical Center is the "can do" and the right spirit. But this disrespect for well built houses and for beautiful trees that are being cut down right and left, that is [wrong]. And the flagrant exhibition of wealth. I used to love the old Houston Country Club. It was a rambling Spanish style with red tile roof ... [Now] it is no architecture. It is just look how big and rich our members are....

## *Reflecting on Women's Roles*

Daddy would say, "... I hope you all vote. You don't deserve your dinner if you don't vote." He saw that we all went out to the polls. He used to say, "I am a Democrat without the accent on the damn." But little by little, we realized that Houston, and especially Texas, needed a two party system. Women Power for Tower helped to elect our first Republican senator [in 1960], and we felt that was the fair thing to do so both parties would vie for our attention instead of being consistently democratic. We were appalled at "Ma" Ferguson. Her husband was indicted [and impeached.] So, "Ma" Ferguson became the governor [in 1925 and again in 1933 for two-year terms,] and assigned herself "Empress of



*Jane Blaffer Owen discussed the importance of philanthropy in Houston. Her Mother gave funding to the University of Houston to set up an art gallery on campus. The black and white photo shows the Blaffer Gallery when it first opened, and the color photograph demonstrates how the Gallery looks today.*

Photo on left from University of Houston Buildings Collection, courtesy of UH Digital Library, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries. Photo on right courtesy of the Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston.

Texas.”... Politics was not very, very pretty. Governor Hogg, of course, was our beloved early governor [1891-1895]... When he left his will, he wanted scores of pecan trees planted around his grave so that the people of Texas could find pecans for free at his gravesite.... They were wonderful people. Beautiful people....


Aunt Ima [Hogg] used to spend her summers with us in Massachusetts, and she and Mommy with our wonderful Dan Clay, our black chauffeur, would go antiquing. They bought many of their things together. Only Mommy had children to leave her furniture to; Aunt Ima never married and left her beautiful collection to the nation [see the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Bayou Bend], She was a gracious, beautiful woman. We all loved her.<sup>8</sup>...

Mother taught the Junior League how to make Mexican food.... She was not a club woman, but her services were always available if anyone asked her. Mother had inherent good taste. Young brides would come to her for advice on furnishing their houses and Mother would say, “It is not what you put in. It is what you keep out,” because we are all pack rats....

The word she hated most in décor was “drapes.” “You don’t need drapes in Houston—you need blinds.” You need blinds to cut out the sun. We had shutters that worked on our house, and they were always closed during the day, that is in the spring and summer, and opened in the evening for the breezes to come in. Then, we had electric fans because I grew up without air-conditioning. Didn’t mind it a bit. The

walls of the house were thick, and the shutters worked, and the electricity, in spite of a reputation for not having any, was functioning.

Now, Mother had a profound influence on my love of art and beauty and poetry. She wrote beautiful poetry herself. So, I was lucky in having two parents that supplemented each other with contrasting gifts.

There had been no women lawyers or doctors in those days, but they were the cultural forces in this city and their excellent minds and hearts laid the foundations for the culture we have today. The men were too busy in their offices working. There were very few divorces as I was growing up. Women didn’t feel neglected because their husbands were on business trips. They simply used their energy and minds to foster the arts, every department of art. And the libraries. I am making rather generalities, but it is generally true. Daddy would come home very tired from a long day at the office, and Mother would say, “But Lee, we are invited to Mrs. So and So’s, we must go.”... He’d say, “If they had not invited us, Sadie, I’d have sent them two dozen red roses!” because ... these men, most of them died in their seventies. I didn’t know any of those early men, my father’s friends and associates, who lived past eighty. They gave so much of themselves, and without air conditioning.... Daddy, Uncle Will, Harry Wise, they all died in their early seventies. They didn’t spare themselves, and the wives didn’t feel neglected. They just got to work and helped build a cultural base for what everyone enjoys now.<sup>9</sup> 



# Houston History Archives: Saving Stories of Region, Place, and People

By Teresa Tomkins-Walsh

Houston History Archives emerged as a relatively new enterprise in the realms of archiving when Joe Pratt relocated *The Houston Review: History and Culture of the Gulf Coast* journal to the University of Houston (UH) from the Houston Public Library. Pratt recognized the aptness of a publication (now the *Houston History* magazine), supported by a research component (UH Oral History Project) and a repository for oral histories and archival collections (Houston History Archives). So Pratt created the interlocking components of the Houston History Project in the Center for Public History.

In fall 2005, Houston History Archives at the University of Houston (UH-HHA) began acquisitions with the mission of building collections covering the growth and development of the Gulf Coast region. Energy, environmental, and ethnic history constitute specific areas of the collection policy. Beyond acquisitions, UH-HHA processes and preserves collections to foster research and disseminate the history of Houston and the Gulf Coast.

Despite its brief existence, UH-HHA continues the traditions of archiving begun in the ancient world, transported to Europe with the Dark Ages, and exported to North America in the nineteenth century. Archives (the term used to designate both the physical site and the matter preserved), represent the interplay of different communities: creators, custodians, and users, each with distinct intentions and skills. UH-HHA operates within the university community as it serves and reflects the interests of Houston's interwoven communities.

Archives also reflect the interplay between private and public. Preserving records began nearly as soon as humans developed writing systems with inherent potential for sharing beyond the creator to other individuals, prescribed groups, or multiple publics. In the ancient world, collections of writing reflected the activities of businesses, legislators, or scholars. Entrepreneurs or family estates created and protected records for private use. Archives often hold collections created for private use, then preserved for the public examination because of the creator's community standing, the scholarly value of the collection, or to provide public information.

Selectivity is another attribute of archives. Archives might be a source of public information but are not comprehensive sources. Creators may sanitize collections before offering them to the archives, and only selected collections

*The Citizens' Environmental Coalition Records housed in the Houston History Archives.*

Photo courtesy of Special Collections,  
M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.





reach archives. Policy, mission, and social forces determine selections, as well as space and funding. Archives of the past selected written record over oral tradition, elites over commoners, and records that mirrored a community's grand narrative.

Houston's grand narrative is the story of the city's growth from a plot of land on Buffalo Bayou into an international business center, managed by the hard work of leaders who valued independence and individualism, a narrative reflected in the papers of John Henry Kirby (1860-1940), also known as the "Father of Industrial Texas." Kirby's collection of letters and photographs was created in the course of business, most likely without the intention, at least initially, that they would reach public view. What was private became public because of Kirby's community stature and because his story reflects Houston's grand narrative. Historians, students, and citizens seek access to such records. Using Kirby's personal papers and other resources, Mary Lasswell wrote *John Henry Kirby: Prince of the Pines* (1967).

Kirby grew up in East Texas and made his fortune in timber. John Henry Kirby's collection includes over two hundred boxes of documents and photographs as well as a number of bound ledgers. Papers include business, political, and family correspondence, and letters that reveal details of his life. Kirby actively engaged in politics; he served two

terms in the Texas legislature in 1913 and in 1927, and served as delegate to the 1916 Democratic National Convention. Letters reveal that Kirby resisted defensive build up for the First World War as late as 1916, and exchanged letters with multiple correspondents to that effect (Box 191, Folder 150).

UH-HHA houses another collection of papers created by a giant of Texas business, Joseph S. Cullinan (1860-1937). As the founder of the Texas Oil Company, Cullinan created and preserved a collection of business and personal papers with tremendous scholarly and public value. Beyond the obvious business ventures covered by John O. King in his 1970 book, *Joseph S. Cullinan: A Study of Leadership in the Texas Petroleum Industry*, Cullinan's collection provides a broader view of Cullinan as a community leader. For instance, Cullinan spearheaded the construction of Houston's Negro Hospital, as a memorial to his son who died in the First World War and as a self-help initiative aimed at improving health care for the city's African Americans. Correspondence reveals the interactions between Cullinan's representatives and black leaders in the South. Letters also cover every detail of the hospital's construction, from costs to the selection of light fixtures, to program and music for the opening ceremony on Juneteenth 1926 (Boxes 18 and 19).

Challenges to Houston's prevailing narrative became visible in the late 1950s and early 1960s. African Americans

*Opening Ceremony for Houston Negro Hospital, Juneteenth 1926.*

Photo from the Joseph S. Cullinan Papers, courtesy of Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.





resided in Houston from the city's founding, but as Robert Bullard noted in *Invisible Houston: Black Experience in Boom and Bust* (2000), the African American community lived below the dominant community's line of vision. UH-HHA acquired Thomas R. Cole Desegregation Papers as part of its mission to collect and tell the story of Houston's ethnic communities.

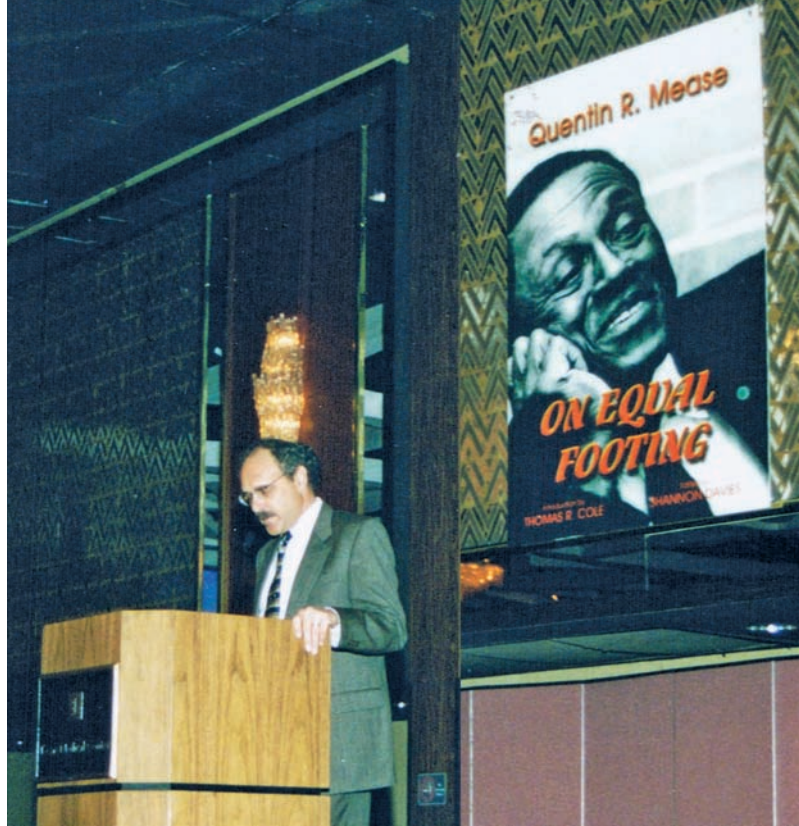
Cole developed three projects designed to illuminate desegregation of Houston. A video entitled, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow* (1997) was Cole's first project. Following the lead of other southern cities, college students from Texas Southern University began to agitate for equal access to local stores and eateries between 1959 and 1963. Cole's research involved multiple interviews with student activists and African American community leaders as well as contributions from Houston's business and political elite. Records include script revisions, fundraising letters, and video clips, as well as interviews with notables such as Lt. Governor Bill Hobby, Curtis Graves, Eldrewey Stearns, and others. Topical segments cover "Houston's image," "Houston in the '50s and '60s," "Union Station," "theaters," and "violence."

Other collection materials include manuscript drafts and publicity materials for Cole's second project, the book, *No Color is My Kind: The Life of Eldrewey Stearns and the Integration of Houston* (1997). Cole interviewed Stearns, one of the key student leaders of civil rights protests in Houston, for the video project and his biography.

Finally, Cole collaborated to compile *On Equal Footing: A Memoir* (2001) by Quentin Mease who died in 2009 at the age of one hundred. A mentor to local leaders, including Stearns, Mease played an integral role in brokering a peaceful transition to desegregation in Houston. He fought for construction of and then ran the first black YMCA in the city and served as the first black member of the Harris County Hospital District, which he later chaired. Archival materials include the transcripts and audiotapes of extended interviews with Mease, press materials, budgets, and fundraising materials.

Rich in primary sources that make it valuable to UH-HHA patrons, Thomas R. Cole's collection reveals the historic contours of civil rights protests that renegotiated Houston's dominant narrative. It also demonstrates the careful steps required in a research project, from funding, to permissions, to transcripts and manuscripts, and finally to public relations.

Ninfa Laurenzo's small collection of memorabilia invites UH-HHA patrons to understand a different kind of struggle in another Houston community. Ninfa's story is legend in Houston. In 1969, Ninfa's husband died suddenly, leaving her five children to rear. Ninfa mortgaged her house and opened a little taqueria on the site of the family's tortilla factory. In 1973, she opened a ten-table restaurant, serving her mother's recipes plus her own. Using money from a friend in Mexico, Ninfa soon opened a second dining room and later pushed out a wall to expand further. Within ten years, the single restaurant grew into a multi-million dollar business with nine restaurants in Houston and one in Dallas. In 1985, Ninfa employed 800-1000 people and served about two million people per year. Some believe that Ninfa



Thomas R. Cole speaking at a pre-publication dinner honoring Quentin Mease, February 27, 2001.

Photo from Thomas Cole Papers, courtesy of Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

Laurenzo laid the foundation for the Mexican restaurant industry in Houston.

With her success, Ninfa became visible beyond her restaurants. She served on numerous non-profit boards. In 1984, Vice-president George H. W. Bush appointed Ninfa to be one of five goodwill ambassadors to welcome Pope John Paul II to Puerto Rico, and in 1988 she seconded Bush's presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention. In 1996, Ninfa Laurenzo was named one of eight Legends of Texas along with Walter Cronkite and Barbara Jordan, recognition for their impact on Texas and its local communities. Ninfa was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame in 1998, and Theatre Under The Stars made her life into a musical (script included in the collection).

Ninfa Laurenzo died in 2001 from breast cancer. Her collection features menus, business plans, awards, and photographs, as well as a typescript of a brief autobiography. A survey of the collection reveals that Ninfa was all about family and community; her restaurants brought her family together, and she invited all of Houston to join her.

By the mid-1960s, Houston's big city affluence had created a city of remarkable growth and employment opportunities but degraded by poor air and water quality, troubled by recurrent flooding, and deficient in park and recreation space. UH-HHA's environmental collections include the records of groups that emerged to improve Houston's quality of life, although concern for Houston's natural amenities began long before the crisis of the 1960s. In Houston, enthusiasm for city beautification blended with the wilderness recreation movement that burgeoned just after the First World War. Rather than constitute a distinct community,



*Women of the Outdoor Nature Club, circa 1920s. Grace Keegan and Ruth Beasley building a fire on an outing.*

Photo from the Outdoor Nature Club Records, courtesy of Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

the conservation/environmental community endorsed the philosophy of Houston's business elites, with the caveat that growth should be planned and include green space, parks, and preserved urban wilderness.

Environmental collections in UH-HHA chronicle the development of an environmental community in Houston, starting with mid-twentieth century volunteer conservation. Joseph Heiser founded the Outdoor Nature Club in 1923. Heiser worked as an accountant for Cullinan's Texas Oil Company, pursuing wilderness recreation and volunteer conservation in his free time. UH-HHA houses a small collection of Heiser's papers and the complete records of the Outdoor Nature Club. In the 1920s, Heiser directed national attention to his campaign to save holly trees along Buffalo Bayou from Christmas harvesting. Both the Outdoor Nature Club and Heiser campaigned with the National Audubon Society to create a sanctuary for the roseate spoonbill on the Vingtune Islands in Trinity Bay in the 1930s. In the 1950s, Heiser and others established the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary in East Texas. Outdoor Nature Club records include a full set of *Spoonbill*, the ornithology group's newsletter, small monographs on selected plant and animal species, and a lovely set of botanical sketches of flowers, grasses, ferns, and lichens, plus all the standard organizational records.

A few members of the Outdoor Nature Club formed Texas Beaches Unlimited in 1958 to protect public access to Texas beaches, endangered by an oil company's successful ploy to secure oil drilling rights along the treasured Gulf Coast shoreline. Sarah and Army Emmott organized to challenge a Texas Supreme Court ruling on the matter. Facing tremendous opposition and supported by some legislative technicalities, Bob Eckhardt's Texas Open Beaches Law passed on July 16, 1959, the first such law passed in the United States. The law's constitutionality was tested, and Sarah Emmott's and Anella Dexter's research won the case, after which Sarah Emmott was named an honorary assistant attorney general.

Founders of Texas Beaches Unlimited, including the Emmotts, built a bridge between mid-twentieth century volunteer conservation and what became the post-World War II environmental movement. In spring 2011, UH-HHA will open the Sarah and Army Emmott Papers to the public, with records of numbers of environmental groups, conservation issues, and scientific projects.

Records of the Bayou Preservation Association (open now) and a partial accession Terry Tarlton Hershey Papers (scheduled to open by end of summer 2011) recount the rise of urban environmental action in Houston. During the mid-1960s, a group of homeowners in Houston's Memorial Park area formed the Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association (BBPA) to protect the natural beauty of their neighborhood bayou. Although BBPA began as a NIMBY (not in my back yard) organization, members realized by 1969 that their concerns for Buffalo Bayou applied to all Harris County watersheds, so the organization expanded its scope and re-tooled its name. Records in the Bayou Preservation Association collection follow the formation of the organization, efforts to encourage congressional support for the cause, and interactions between the group and the Harris County Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Aside from organization records, the collection contains books, engineering reports, monographs, and seminar materials.

The campaign to preserve Buffalo Bayou lasted for five years and ended successfully in 1971, after Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act. During the five years Terry Hershey worked with other concerned women to form Citizens Who Care, an organization that evolved into the Citizens' Environmental Coalition. Realizing that a number of small groups dedicated to improving Houston's quality of life struggled independently, the women of Citizens Who Care decided that Houston needed a coordinating organization to facilitate environmental efforts. Working informally, Citizens' Environmental Coalition sponsored a community education program on air quality, in preparation for June 1970 hearings by the Texas Air Control Board. Their effort persuaded 1,500 citizens to attend the air quality hearing and led to the formal establishment of the Coalition.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition continues as the communication nexus for Houston's environmental community. In the beginning, it offered telephone answering services, an information hotline, and recommendations for expert speakers among other services. During the late 1980s, CEC sponsored a program on KPFT, Radio Pacifica, entitled "Talk of the Earth." By the 1990s, CEC had established a website and sent a weekly email newsletter. Records housed in UH-HHA cover this activity and the annual Synergy awards. One of the major accomplishments of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition is the resource guide, still produced annually and posted on the Coalition website; UH-HHA holds all back issues.

Also during the mid-1960s, concerned Houstonians formed Billboards Limited to reduce billboard blight. Billboards Limited supported a City of Houston sign ordinance to create standards and regulations for billboards in the city, but the billboard industry fought regulation. By





*Foley's new building on Main at Dallas, opening the construction project to the community in 1947.*

Photo from the Foley's Department Store Records, courtesy of Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

1980, more than 10,000 billboards degraded Houston roads, and the media called Houston the "Billboard Capitol of the World." During the 1980s, Billboards Limited reorganized into the Lone Star Roadside Council and in the 1990s established Scenic Texas, Inc., a statewide entity with Scenic Houston as its largest and most active local chapter. Records housed in UH-HHA follow permutations of Houston's billboard ordinances from the 1960s to 2007.

UH-HHA's newest environmental acquisition, the David Marrack Papers, reflects Marrack's participation in many of the organizations mentioned above, but Marrack's papers add a new dimension to UH-HHA's environmental records. As a physician, Marrack studied public health issues arising from environmental problems. His collection covers legal cases, public health data, and details for a number of campaigns including environmental challenges to projects such as the Wallisville Dam. It will be at least a year before Marrack's papers can be opened to public access. Other environmental collections scheduled for processing are the Hana Ginzburg Papers related to the preservation of Armand Bayou and Kay Crooker's Papers collected from her years of activism in city planning.

As described above, collections housed in UH-HHA reflect the concerns of disparate groups within the city. One collection, however, resonates as a symbol of community for anyone who lived in Houston during the twentieth century. Opening to the public in spring 2011, the Foley's Department Store Records hold memories, pleasant or disagreeable, for all Houston. Part of Houston's booming growth since 1900, Foley's Brothers Dry Goods Store expanded over the first half of the twentieth century. Everyone in Houston knew Foley's, even when African Americans

were denied equal access to restrooms and prohibited from trying on clothes.

Foley's represented more to Houston than a retail store. Located downtown, it was the city's biggest store by 1927 and included an auditorium used as a civic center and a rehearsal hall for the Houston Symphony. During the Bank Holiday of 1933, Foley's replaced patrons' personal checks with Foley's checks which were accepted at stores around town. When banks reopened and Foley's deposited the personal checks, every check cleared. Foley's sponsored Houston's Thanksgiving Parade from 1950 to 1993, served



*Foley's Thanksgiving parade was a highly anticipated annual event in Houston, n.d.*

Photo from the Foley's Department Store Records, courtesy of Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

as one of Houston's major philanthropists, and promoted educational opportunity through retail scholarships and distributive education opportunities. Even now everyone recalls Foley's Christmas windows, including people denied full access to Foley's retail amenities in earlier times.

Foley's began a new chapter in retailing when the new store opened on Main at Dallas in 1947. Designed by Kenneth Franzheim, the store offered a full block and six floors of retail space. Photographs of the building site and the new building reveal the first escalators in the South, state-of-the-art kitchens, and ventilation ducts. On opening day, as at least 8,000 shoppers explored the new store, Foley's proffered an invitation to postwar consumerism with every imaginable product displayed in grand surroundings.

Because of its visibility, Foley's became a central site for the desegregation efforts described in the Thomas Cole projects. Students mounted protests outside the store and staged a sit-in at the Foley's Fountain, where food service to African Americans was prohibited. Although Foley's initially resisted the protests, store management responded to the persuasion of John T. Jones, Jr. and agreed to desegregate the store quietly before most of Houston residents realized what had happened. As a result, Foley's example spearheaded the desegregation of Houston as hotels, movie theaters, and other public facilities followed suit. Houston had begun to change. At the height of her success, Ninfa featured a line of Mexican-themed dinnerware at Foley's.


Architectural themes recur throughout the Foley's collection, with the drawings, plans, and photographs of the central downtown store and its predecessors. Records in the Foley's collection also document the process of suburbanization in Houston. By the 1960s, Foley's began building branches to meet the needs of suburban residents. Architectural renderings and photographs reveal the long, low store designs characteristic of sprawling, low density suburban development patterns in Houston.

Archives endure as repositories of knowledge and information in the form of books and manuscripts, maps, photographs, and, more recently, video images and online exhibits. Most historians will affirm that history follows the documents. Communities that collect and transmit knowledge through oral tradition are less likely to preserve documents, and documents created by those excluded from the mainstream are often missing from archives and histories.

Since the 1960s and the emergence of history from the "bottom up," oral history has entered the toolbox of methodologies available to historians. Although oral history collections include interviews with elites, collections also preserve the memories of ordinary people. Unlike traditional historical inquiry, which is often an isolated undertaking that privileges the memories of elites who author books and leave public legacies, oral history embodies diversity, with projects designed to collect and preserve the everyday experiences of numbers of people who shared a place or event. With the inclusion of oral history, historical research becomes possible for broader segments of communities, including young people and the elderly, who often work together to preserve stories of the past for the generations of the future.

UH-HHA is building a collection of those everyday stories—now reaching nearly 700 interviews—to offer patrons evidence of life events from living witnesses told in their own words, in transcripts, recorded voices, and, in many cases, photographs. The collection continues to grow with interviews from oil field workers, activists, ethnic communities, even Hurricane Katrina first-responders.

UH-HHA's mission is to collect records that reflect Houston communities, but UH-HHA is itself a community of curators, custodians, and researchers. UH students organize, label, folder, and inventory the collections to prepare them for public use. During the 2009-2010 academic year, freshman Brittainy Perry worked in UH-HHA as a Work-Study STAR in the Foley's collection, developing a research project and poster on Foley's role in the desegregation of downtown Houston. During summer 2010 and continuing into the academic year, a number of graduate students worked in UH-HHA to prepare collections for public access. Tanmay Wagh, an electrical engineering master's student, spent endless hours organizing audiotapes and migrating digital files for the oral histories. Fangyi Lu, working on her master's in architecture, immersed herself in the environmental collections, preparing records for the public but also identifying vital information for her research. UH-HHA is more than boxes and shelves and old papers. It is people who are an integral part of the university, reaching into Houston communities, teaching and learning to implement a mission that serves the present and informs the future.

UH-HHA is located in Special Collections in the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston. For more information, direct inquiries to [tomkinswalsh@uh.edu](mailto:tomkinswalsh@uh.edu). 

**Dr. Teresa (Terry) Tomkins-Walsh** manages the Houston History Archives and writes environmental history with special attention on Houston's environmental action.



*Graduate students working in UH-HHA collections during summer 2010.*

Photo courtesy of Special Collections,  
M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.



# When There Were Wards: A Series

## Third Ward, Steeped in Tradition of Self-reliance and Achievement

By Ezell Wilson

The historic Third Ward was originally an area east of Main Street, south of Congress Street and extending to the city limits. For the residents of the Third Ward, their identity with the ward went beyond the original intent of its nomenclature as a political division. African Americans in Third Ward identified with the name and the region out of a sense of pride in the history of the area—a history in which Black people were active agents in building an enduring community. Though historically the Fourth Ward and Freedmen’s Town were Black cultural centers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Third Ward grew in prominence, eventually passing Fourth Ward in population and the attraction of Black institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Early settlement grew rapidly in the post Civil War era as former slaves from within Houston’s immediate surroundings as well as plantations in Brazoria, Ft. Bend, and other counties settled in the area. Sometimes arriving on foot, they were forced into separate enclaves within each of Houston’s wards that lay on the outskirts of town. As whites moved out, African Americans moved in, establishing neighborhoods and institutions in the process. They came into the city to work as mechanics, wagon and omnibus drivers, masons, and in a number of other professions—much to the chagrin of some whites who feared losing their jobs.<sup>2</sup>

As whites sold land at the edge of town, sometimes on credit, Blacks quickly acquired the property and began to build their own homes in Third Ward. By the 1880s, approximately twenty-five percent of Black households in Third Ward were owner occupied. The homes built in the Third Ward followed a number of vernacular styles, including some that were hybrids—an innovation brought about by the advent of house catalogs, which allowed homeowners to pick the style of house they wanted to build and add on details from other styles listed. This

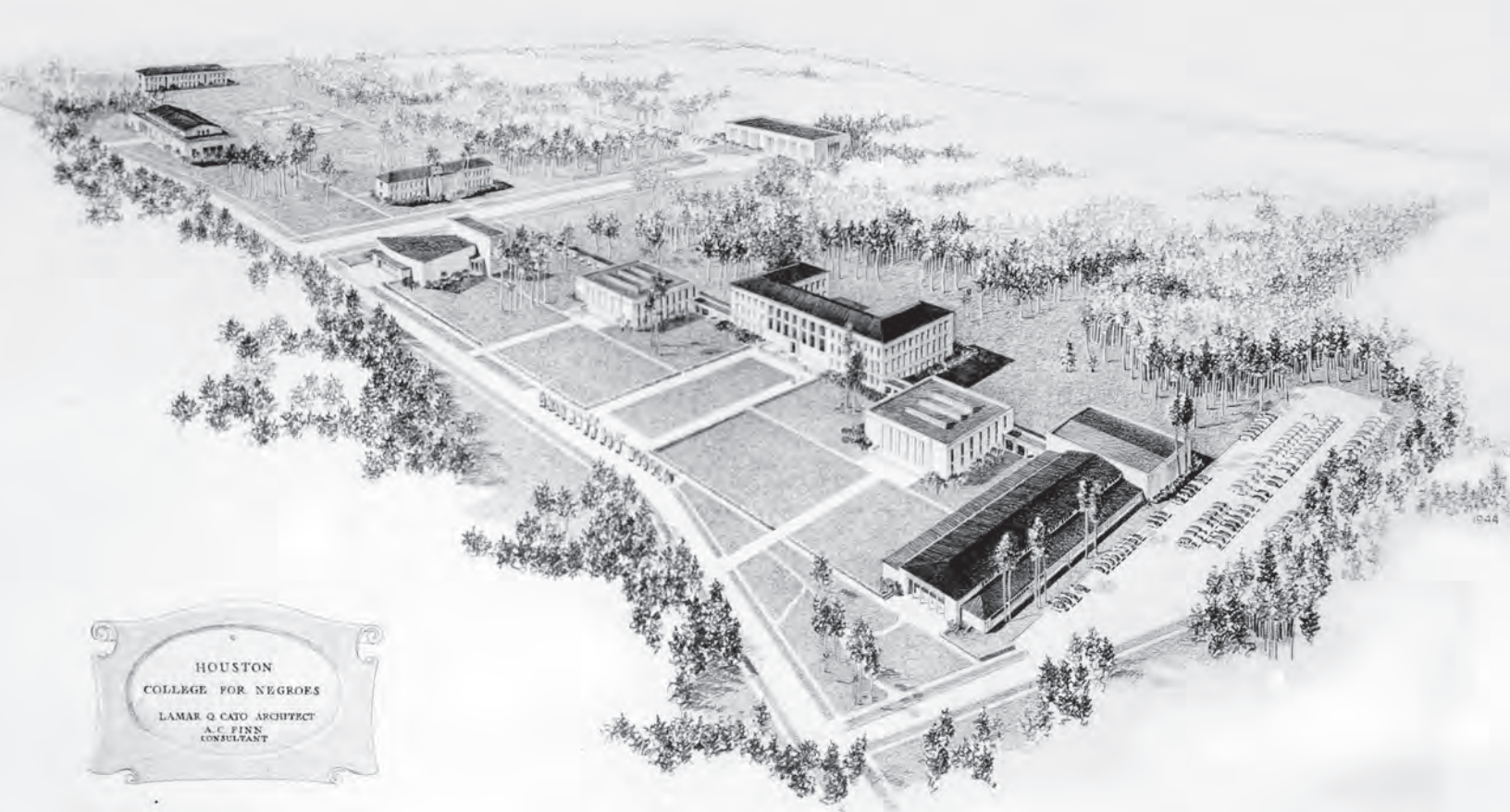


*“Shotgun houses,” commonly seen in Third Ward, are thought to have originated in Louisiana. These pictures illustrate the difference in appearance of homes before (above) and after (below) restoration by Project Row Houses.*

Photo by Ashley Clemmer-Hoffman courtesy of Project Row Houses.







*Architectural drawing for Houston College for Negroes, now Texas Southern University.*

Photo courtesy of Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

resulted in the diffusion of regional styles on a national level, including one commonly found in Houston's Black communities: the shotgun house.<sup>3</sup>

Receiving this name because a shotgun shell fired at the front door would travel through the house and out the back door without hitting anything, shotgun houses were one room wide, one story tall, with the rooms arranged in a row without hallways, and doors at opposite ends of the facade. Though some relate the style to the New York brownstone, the shotgun is believed to have traveled from New Orleans, where such houses date back to about 1800. Others believe it originated in West African house building traditions, while John Michael Vlach writes that the shotgun represents a New World Euro-American hybrid style that came to New Orleans via Haiti.<sup>4</sup> Ubiquitous throughout the Third Ward, the shotgun house figured prominently in the artwork of Texas Southern University professor John Biggers. Shotguns declined in popularity as the automobile became more prevalent; however, many still remain in Third Ward, most notably those preserved by Project Row Houses, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community through the celebration of African American art and culture.

Having built their own homes and churches, Third Ward residents willingly accepted government assistance in building educational institutions. The Freedmen's Bureau funded and operated early schools while the American Missionary Association staffed them with northern white missionaries. The Texas Legislature created Black schools in 1870. Third Ward's first school of record was the Third Ward School, located on Walker Street. By 1879, it had 100 students and in 1885, was renamed Douglass (Elementary) for reformer

and statesman Frederick Douglass. Blackshear Elementary, formerly known as Emancipation School, was established in 1916.<sup>5</sup>

The Houston school district established Yates High School in 1926 as the city's second high school for African Americans. (Fourth Ward's Colored High School/Booker T. Washington opened in 1893.) Named for the Rev. Jack Yates, the original Yates High School building at 2610 Elgin now houses James D. Ryan Middle School, designated to honor Yates' first principal. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the school hosted night classes for the Houston College for Negroes, which would later move to its own property and become Texas Southern University.<sup>6</sup> Founders established the Houston College for Negroes in part through the efforts of Wiley College, which opened in Marshall, Texas, in 1873; its notable debate team was the subject of the Hollywood film, *The Great Debaters*.

An act of the Texas Legislature formed Texas Southern University in 1947, following a decision by the Supreme Court in *Sweatt v. Painter*. Heman Sweatt, a postal worker, filed suit in 1946 after being denied entry into the University of Texas School of Law solely on the basis of his race. Taking the national battle against segregation a step closer to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Court ordered creation of a "separate but equal" school for African American students, which became Texas State University for Negroes.<sup>7</sup> Despite some initial concern about the viability of another accredited historically Black university so close to Prairie View A&M, TSU's enrollment grew steadily. It received the support of the local community, while bringing in academics from the Houston area



and other parts of the country. Many of these professors and administrators resided in the greater Third Ward area, integrating formerly white neighborhoods like Riverside Terrace in the process. TSU holds the distinction as the first historically Black college in Texas to have a law school, the Thurgood Marshall School of Law. During the Civil Rights Era, TSU students, faculty, and administrators stood at the forefront of many acts of civil disobedience in the struggle for change.

One of the decisive actions against Jim Crow and segregation in Houston was a sit-in at the lunch counter in Weingarten's, a grocery and deli located on Almeda Road. Weingarten's, like many other businesses, allowed Blacks to make purchases but did not allow them to sit and dine with whites. TSU student Eldreway Stearns and other school leaders organized the sit-in a few weeks after the one in Greensboro, North Carolina, that received national attention.<sup>8</sup> TSU President, Dr. Sam Nabrit, refused to expel students for fighting for their civil rights, despite political pressure. As a result of the sit-in, Weingarten's pulled up all the stools and allowed Blacks to stand next to whites to order their food. Days later, the sit-in movement spread

downtown to Foley's and the City Hall cafeteria, helping to end segregation in Houston without the use of violence.

Riverside Hospital, opened in 1926 as Houston Negro Hospital, was one of the first nonprofit hospitals in the city for African Americans. Additionally, it provided a place for Black physicians and nurses to work and train. Houston had eleven hospitals at the time, but none of them provided adequate services to the Black community. Typically, Blacks would be treated in the segregated wards of charity hospitals where Black physicians had no rights to admit patients who then had to endure long wait times to see a hospital physician. The Union Hospital served Blacks but with only six beds and minimal equipment was far too small a facility to meet the community's needs. Founded by Meharry graduate Dr. B. J. Covington, Dr. Rupert Orlando Roett, Sr., and others, Riverside originally operated out of a house, but oilman J. S. Cullinan rebuilt it in a Spanish Colonial Revival style in memory of his son, John Cullinan. As a lieutenant in the Army, John led Black soldiers in World War I, and it is believed that his favorable impression of them may have contributed to the senior Cullinan's donation to construct a Black hospital.<sup>9</sup>

Black churches exerted considerable influence in African American communities, and ministers were often community leaders. More than ninety churches stood in Third Ward, where they served as social and civic centers as well as places of worship. The congregation established Trinity United Methodist Church in 1848 as a mission church. Twenty years later, the Reverend Jack Yates and other ex-slaves founded Antioch Baptist Church in the Fourth Ward. Wesley Chapel AME Church was founded in 1875, and housed in a building designed by William Sidney Pittman, a pioneer African American architect. St. John's Baptist Missionary Church on Dowling Street was founded in 1889. The current building constructed in 1948 with its Ionic Temple style appeared more typical of the 1920s than the decade in which it was built.<sup>10</sup>

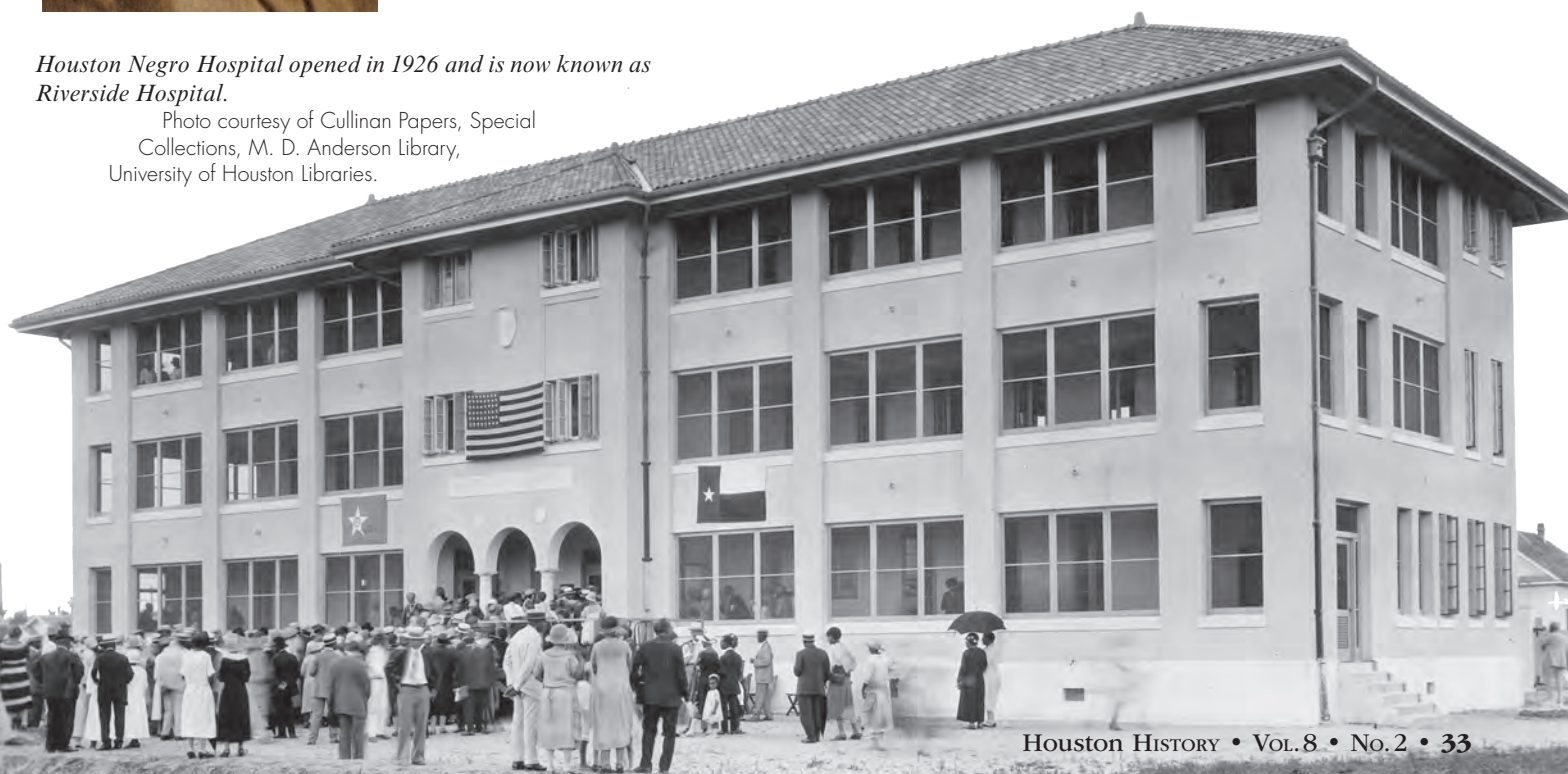


*Oilman J. S. Cullinan contributed \$80,000 to the building of Houston Negro Hospital.*

Photo courtesy of Cullinan Papers, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.

*Houston Negro Hospital opened in 1926 and is now known as Riverside Hospital.*

Photo courtesy of Cullinan Papers, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries.



As part of its community service, Trinity United played a role in establishing Wiley College and TSU. Many of the early educators and faculty in the Third Ward schools worshipped in the local congregations or served as ministers. Churches provided housing assistance and financial counseling to members when they could. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church helped establish an Upward Bound program at TSU. During the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, churches in Houston—much like Black churches elsewhere in the South—got involved in efforts such as voter registration drives. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church started a local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Wesley Chapel AME served as a meeting place for many involved in the civil rights struggle.

Begun in 1893 as *Texas Freeman*, the *Houston Informer* remains one of the oldest Black newspapers west of the Mississippi River. Founded by Charles Love, *Freeman* merged with Carter Wesley's *The Informer* in 1931 to become *Houston Informer and Texas Freeman*. It took an active role in furthering civil rights and supporting the movement's leaders. The paper addressed issues facing the African American community, including the need for better healthcare facilities, which eventually led to establishing Riverside Hospital, and investigated incidents of police brutality, another longstanding issue. During the integration of the Riverside Terrace neighborhood, *The Informer* covered the race-based terrorist bombing of the home of Jack Caesar, the first African American to move into the previously all-white and predominately Jewish neighborhood. In the offices of *The Informer*, NAACP attorney and future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall dictated a brief

for court action that eventually led to Blacks being granted the right to vote. When Richard Grovey helped organize the Negro Democratic Club, *The Informer* gave him space for editorials. The *Houston Defender*, another Black Houston paper begun in 1930 by C. F. Richardson, also took the position of community advocate, calling for equal rights, paved streets, additional parks, more sensitive high school curricula, and anti-lynching laws, among other things. In 1948, radio station KCOH-1430 AM began broadcasting as a classical, easy listening radio station. In 1953, Robert Meeker bought the station, making it the first Black-owned radio station in the state. Now located on Almeda, the station plays gospel, blues, and talk radio programs.<sup>11</sup> Much like the Black press, the talk shows on KCOH served as an outlet to discuss community matters.

In 1872, Rev. Jack Yates and other ex-slaves purchased ten acres at the corner of Elgin and Dowling for \$1,000.00. The land became Emancipation Park where former slaves and their descendants would gather annually to celebrate Juneteenth. The holiday on June 19th marks the date in 1865 when news reached Texas that the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves from bondage. For many years, Emancipation Park remained the only local park open to African Americans. It was later donated to the City of Houston.<sup>12</sup>

Although downtown had a thriving Black business district in its north end, a great many businesses run by African Americans lined Dowling Street in Third Ward. Many of Texas' African American barbers were trained at the Tyler Barber College, and professional stylists received training at the Franklin Beauty School, founded in 1915 by



Shown here is one of the big bands that played the El Dorado Ballroom, which hosted legends such as Ray Charles and Lightnin' Hopkins.

Photo courtesy of Project Row Houses.




Madame N. Franklin. Also on Dowling the Watchtower Insurance Company, Huckaby Funeral Home, and Teal Portrait Studio, served the community. Several theaters entertained residents, including the Dowling Theatre, the Holman Theatre, and the Park Theatre, which opened in 1937 and closed in 1969.<sup>13</sup> Before arriving in Houston, notable businessman of the era, Mack Hannah, operated pool halls, a restaurant, a barbershop, and a funeral home in Port Arthur. In Houston, he started Mack Hannah Life Insurance, the Gulf Coast Mortgage Company, and the Standard Savings and Loan Association.<sup>14</sup>

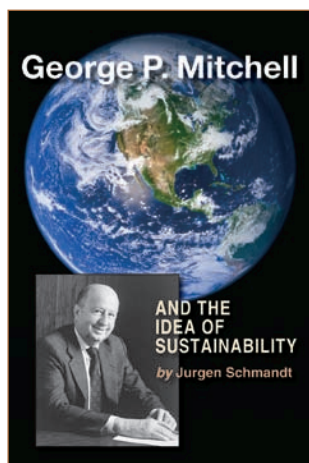
Many social institutions also called Dowling Street home, such as the Professional Amateur Boxing Association (PABA), which Reverend Ray Martin founded in 1969 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing Third Ward youth to the sport as an alternative to delinquent activities.<sup>15</sup> The office of Eldreway Stearns at 2206 Dowling served as the unofficial headquarters of the civil rights movement in Houston with many planning meetings being held there. Built in 1939 on Dowling Street, across from Emancipation Park, stands the El Dorado Ballroom. A regular stop on the Chitlin' Circuit for musicians, it hosted numerous icons like Cab Calloway, Nat "King" Cole, and Ray Charles, as well as local legends like Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins. A genre of music known as Bayou City Blues became popular at the El Dorado and other venues like Miss Ann's Playpen and Etta's Lounge.

Of course, the Third Ward landscape has greatly changed now. Many of the places mentioned in this article are

memories, the buildings closed, and, in some cases, razed. Gentrification has made inroads into some parts of the neighborhood, while other areas are poorly maintained, with empty storefronts, churches, and shotgun houses serving as the hollowed-out markers of their former selves. Drug use, crime, and neglect occur in some areas, while both the University of Houston and Texas Southern University continue to expand their campuses.

People who live in the Third Ward still identify strongly with the neighborhood. This may be due to the rich history here—a history of achievement and self reliance. From the initial settling of those former slaves in the Third Ward, the Black community made many strides towards building a cohesive community in an era of exclusion. They built churches and educated their young. They came looking for work, and many even created their own businesses. They expressed themselves through their art, through their own media outlets, and in their own venues. Since they were excluded from many opportunities, they created their own. What's more, they also took action and ended the de jure exclusion of segregation itself. These institutions make up the fabric of the Third Ward community, a community whose name no longer invokes the dead geopolitical designation it originally had but now stands for a sense of belonging to a tradition of doing for self and others. 

**Ezell Wilson** is a master's student in history at the University of Houston and a resident of the Third Ward.



## George P. Mitchell and the Idea of Sustainability

Jurgen Schmandt

Schmandt traces the idea of a sustainable society, documenting Mitchell's engagement with and support of the idea. The author also studies the Mitchell Paradox, illustrating how Mitchell did not adhere to these ideals in his business.

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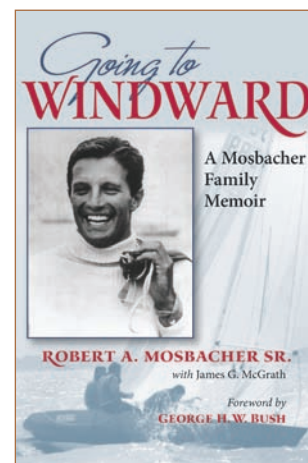


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## Going to Windward

A Mosbacher Family Memoir

Robert A. Mosbacher Sr. with James G. McGrath

Foreword by George H. W. Bush

The former U.S. Secretary of Commerce (Bush Administration) takes readers on an unforgettable ride with his father through the New York City of the 1930s, narrates his discovery of a huge natural gas field in the 1950s, and tells of his deepening involvement with the business and political power structures of Texas and the nation, beginning in the 1970s. 336 pp. 68 b&w photos.

Index. cloth \$30.00

# Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder: Third Ward Art Treasure but a Memory

By Debbie Z. Harwell



*The Mothers of the "The Father and the Son," 1970-1971.*




*Dere's a "Han Writin on de Wall," 1970-1971.*

Images courtesy of Texas Southern University.

Harvey Johnson came to Houston from Port Arthur to study art at Texas Southern University under world-renowned artist, sculptor, and teacher, John Biggers, who founded the school's art program in 1949. The two had met when Johnson was in the tenth grade, and they connected instantly. Johnson recalled, "As soon as John and I met each other—our eyes met—immediately we started reading each other's mind. I mean I could read his mind, and he would read my mind, and we believed the same things. So he took what my mother gave me in terms of my culture, and he helped me to articulate it—to crystallize it—into visual imagery. That's what John did." Harvey Johnson completed his undergraduate degree at TSU and went on to get his MFA at Washington State University. He returned two years later to teach art at TSU for thirty-four years before retiring in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

Biggers, who encouraged his students to think big and embrace their heritage, began a tradition by requiring senior students to paint a mural on campus. Those that stood the test remained permanent fixtures, while others were painted over after a few months. Johnson's work, which Biggers judged to be an important contribution, included two murals that have graced the university's administration building, Hannah Hall, since his days as a student: *Mothers of the Fathers and the Son* and *Dere's a Han Writin on de Wall*. Both pictures symbolized Johnson's emphasis on the importance of mothers to society and the ancestral contribution of African art to American culture.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the murals did not withstand the installation of a new president, John Rudley, in 2008. Calling the murals near his office "eyesores," Rudley had them painted over with white paint in September 2010. He told a *Houston Chronicle* reporter, "When I bring dignitaries to campus, I can't have them seeing that kind of thing. All art isn't good art." After just two years at TSU, Rudley—trained in business—became the final art critic over John Biggers, the artists in the university's art department, and countless others who had appreciated the works for four decades.<sup>3</sup>

TSU museum director and art history professor, Alvia Wardlaw delivered the news to Johnson personally. Johnson was devastated. He saw it as akin to destroying a historical document—of Biggers who established the mural art program at TSU and of Johnson's own tenure there. A few days after the uproar at the mural's removal, Rudley committed \$50,000 to evaluate and restore some of the remaining murals. Too late for Johnson's work. Now TSU, Third Ward, and the city of Houston must suffer the consequences for the failure to preserve this piece of community history.<sup>4</sup> 

Debbie Z. Harwell is the managing editor of *Houston History*.



## TWO WORLDS A MILE APART

# A Brief History of the Fourth Ward

By Patricia Pando



*Charlotte Baldwin Allen, the wife of Houston founder Augustus Allen and a powerful landowner in her own right, lived in Houston from its earliest days. Some stories credit her with naming the city. From the 1850s when the house was built until her death in 1895, she kept watch on her city from her home at Rusk and Main Streets. In 1929, the Gulf Building (now the J. P. Morgan Chase Building) rose on the site.*

Clatter of light rail running down Main Street, cars roaring by, crowds gathering at the crosswalk champing to get on with the day—hectic life fills twenty-first century downtown Houston. But when a Houstonian takes a short stroll from the busy intersection of Congress and Main to nearby Sesquicentennial Park and wanders down the walk to Buffalo Bayou and its spanning bridge, the world changes. On this amazing walk of only a few blocks, 173 years fade away. As the visitor approaches the bridge, she'll hear an 1837-era steamboat whistle (courtesy of the City of Houston) taking her back in time to when the Torrey brothers moved along the bayou looking for a band of Alabama-Coushattas, preparing to set up camp and do some trading.<sup>1</sup>

Trading was so good for the Torrey brothers along that stretch of bayou, they decided to stay. In a grove of magnolia trees, they built the first frame house in Houston; at first a trading post but soon purchased by R. D. Taylor. It remained home for Taylor and his family for many years.

Other industrious folks headed for the nascent city founded by brothers John Kirby Allen and Augustus Allen only the year before. The city incorporated in 1837 and welcomed new citizens like Andrew Briscoe, a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and first judge of Harrisburg County (as Harris County was then known) who erected an impressive two-story home at Main and Prairie.<sup>2</sup>

The Republic of Texas president, Sam Houston, in a letter to Senator Robert Irion (later the republic's secretary of state) reported that in April, Houston had more than 100 houses and a population of 1,500. The city had new citizens—and more. It was now the capital of the new republic. Construction of the capitol building, appropriately located on Texas Avenue, began in April 1837.<sup>3</sup>

All images from the George Fuermann "Texas and Houston" Collection, courtesy of UH Digital Library, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston Libraries unless otherwise noted.

On May 4, the Senate and the House convened and elected officers in the still unfinished building. The next day, President Houston received an enthusiastic welcome and addressed the audience of legislators and citizens from a flag-draped podium. Thus began Houston's two glory years as the republic's capital. All too soon, on October 12, 1839, a crowd watched as workers loaded the republic's furniture and records into waiting wagons. The next morning, President Mirabeau Lamar and an entourage of officials rode by the Capitol and saluted as they headed to the new capital of Texas, Austin. Later that afternoon, a sign appeared in a window of the now empty building, "For lease to responsible parties."

A few weeks later the Allen brothers advertised in the *Texas Morning Star*: "The Capitol for Rent—This large and commodious building can now be rented. There is no building in Texas so well or better arranged for public house. It can be had on reasonable terms." Within a month, the capitol building became the Capitol Hotel commencing a rich and continuing chapter in Houston history. This location, first as the Capitol Hotel, and later as the better-known Rice Hotel, welcomed many distinguished guests. Sam Houston was not the only national president to visit. Benjamin Henry Harrison, William Howard Taft, and Franklin D. Roosevelt came calling, as did, of course, Texan Lyndon Johnson. John F. Kennedy enjoyed his last dinner on the evening of November 21, 1963, in the International Suite of the Rice Hotel.<sup>4</sup>

In 1839, the same year Houston lost its role as capital, the city adopted the ward system to define its political units—a system that continued until 1905. Congress Street and Main Street arbitrarily divided the four wards; South of Congress and west of Main lay the Fourth Ward, encompassing Market Square and the old capitol.<sup>5</sup>

Recent studies of the Fourth Ward focus on post-Civil War growth along West Dallas (called San Felipe Road at the time) toward Taft. In these studies, the eastern boundary is I-45, the Gulf Freeway. But the Gulf Freeway, the first freeway in Texas, did not appear until the mid-twentieth century. For more than a hundred years, the Fourth Ward was one unbroken stretch from the center of town into its southern and western fringes.<sup>6</sup>

In the early days, most action took place in the thriving center of town; however, early on, one thing was missing. A cemetery. The need for a cemetery became more crucial as the population grew and as yellow fever epidemics swept the young city. Responding to the suddenly critical need, the Allen brothers went to what was then the edge of town on San Felipe Road, now the heart of Fourth Ward, to establish Houston's first cemetery, today known as Founders Cemetery. Quickly it filled. Many early leaders are buried here, including John Kirby Allen. Several markers tell a sad story. Heroes of the Battle of San Jacinto, able to withstand Santa Anna's onslaught, became helpless in the face of yellow fever. They were not alone. Between July and December in 1839, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* reported that 229

*When Houston relinquished the capital of Texas to Austin, the capitol building became the popular Capitol Hotel. In the mid-1850s, many guests arrived by stagecoach. In 1882, a larger, more ornate building replaced it. Today the Rice Lofts, once Jesse Jones' Rice Hotel, is on the site.*





people, about sixteen percent of the city's population, succumbed to the plague.<sup>7</sup>

Crowds gathered at the cemetery for more than funerals. S. O. Young, a founder of the *Houston Post*, recalled in his 1913 reminisces of early Houston that on at least three occasions hangings were held in the southeast corner of the property where a grove of trees was known as "Hangsman Grove." The first legal hanging in Houston took place here in 1853 when a man named Hyde was executed for killing a traveler whom he robbed. Two other executions, one in 1868 and another about two years later, took place here. Young declared that he was a witness to both. After this, hanging did take place in Houston, but at the jail.<sup>8</sup>

The growth of churches came slowly and less dramatically. From the beginning, citizens participated in a variety of religious activities, frequently meeting in the capitol building. Both the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches organized in the Senate chamber. Church buildings did not appear so swiftly. The Allens donated a half block on Texas between Travis and Milam to the fledgling Methodists for their building. It took six years for the group to organize and build. In 1843, they announced plans for a brick church building on the site. It was the first brick building in the city, and possibly the first in Texas.<sup>9</sup>

At the time the congregation had sixty-eight members; thirty-two of them were African American, slaves of their fellow members. Later these African American members were given a separate building facing Milam, which they

subsequently moved to the corner of Travis and Bell, where it became Trinity Methodist Church. Today the church stands at the corner of Holman and Live Oak in the Third Ward.<sup>10</sup>

The brick building served the white congregation until 1883 when the Charles Shearn Memorial Church, as it was then named, erected a building of some elegance topped by a 130 foot tower. Finally, in 1907 members sold the property for \$115,000. They renamed themselves First Methodist Church and moved to the present location at Main and Clay.<sup>11</sup>

New church neighbors soon joined the Methodists. The Baptists organized their church under the leadership of two women, Mrs. C. M. Fuller and, the appropriately named, Mrs. Piety L. Hadley. Poor in both finances and support, they set off to raise money for a building. In the universal spirit of church women, they organized craft fairs. They once received a mule as a donation for their project. They promptly fattened it up and sold it at a good price at the next fair. They made enough money to purchase lots on the corner of Texas and Travis. The first Baptist church built in Houston rose there and served its congregation until 1883.<sup>12</sup>

Prosperous shops in the Market Square area attracted more entrepreneurs. A preponderance of traffic for the market came in down San Felipe Road bringing merchandise and agricultural products from the fertile land west of the city. Most travelers lived south of Buffalo Bayou. The few coming in from the north used a ferry at the foot of Texas Avenue or the footbridges scattered along the bayou. The Harrisburg ferry provided access to the east. Wagon trains were beginning to arrive from Hempstead, northwest of the city, and the growing number of plantations along the upper Brazos and Colorado Rivers sent their products to the market. And, of course, the travelers and traders returned home along the same routes carrying their purchases and supplies. In 1848, the city responded to this traffic problem with the first bridge to span Buffalo Bayou—the Preston Street Bridge opened the doors of the Fourth Ward and downtown Houston.<sup>13</sup>

"In those years, Market Square was like a perennial county fair. Traders and vendors hawked their goods; women in sunbonnets and homespuns, men wearing steerhide jeans, bargained for choice venison, roasts or wild turkeys. This noisy teeming place was so much the center of Houston that businessmen sought sites for their stores," Francis R. Lubbock, Houston storeowner and rancher, later governor of Texas, recounted in his book, *Six Decades in Texas*.<sup>14</sup>

After the close of the Civil War, again, newcomers flooded into the city. Many were newly emancipated African Americans coming in from the outlying plantations to the west of town. Traveling along San Felipe Road, they settled in the city outskirts near Founders Cemetery. Some were able to buy their own homes. Others rented from white landlords. One popularly told story is how a Second Ward resident and former slaveholder offered free lots in the Fourth Ward to his former possessions. The area quickly became predominately, although never entirely, Black. Known as Freedmen's Town, it remains the heart of today's Fourth Ward.<sup>15</sup>



*Sung and unsung Texas heroes, including John Kirby Allen, lie buried beneath the sheltering oaks of Founders Cemetery on West Dallas in the Fourth Ward. Neighboring historic Beth Israel Cemetery is the oldest Jewish cemetery in the city. The mausoleum, visible on the left, was designed by synagogue member and noted architect Joseph Finger.*

Photo by Patricia Pando.





*Looking north on Main Street from Lamar, the tower of the First Presbyterian Church is on the left in the Fourth Ward. Across the arbitrary boundary defined by Main Street is the Third Ward. This painting is based on a photograph taken in 1919.*

Even before this influx of emigrants, former slave residents of Houston established what would become an important institution not only to Fourth Ward residents but to the city-wide African American community. Early in 1866, months after Texas emancipation, several African Americans met to establish their own Baptist church. The First Baptist Church invited the as-yet homeless congregation for their first service. The twelve members who attended welcomed seven new members who joined by baptism. The new Antioch Missionary Baptist Church later met in a brush arbor on the banks of Buffalo Bayou, and then in a frame structure at Rusk and Bagby. Antioch joined Trinity Methodist in Black church leadership.

The church did more than hold services. Its official history states, "Antioch provided the former slaves with opportunities to learn not only about God, but ministries were provided to help develop educationally, economically and socially."

The impressive Jack Yates, himself a former slave, who became pastor late in 1868, led most of these endeavors. The church's Baptist Academy brought basic education opportunities, offering classes in reading, writing, and arithmetic

and also training in trades so that individuals might find jobs or set up businesses for themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Yates became a critical leader in the Fourth Ward. He built his own home on Andrews Street in 1870. The building is now in Sam Houston Park. By 1875, the church was looking for a new home. Richard Allen, an active businessman and the first black legislator to represent Harris County, designed a red-brick structure at what is now 500 Clay, the first African American-owned brick structure in the city. The congregation thrived, and in 1890, added a second story giving the church much the appearance it has today as it sits in the shelter of near-by towering skyscrapers and continues to serve its congregation and community.<sup>17</sup>

Through the rest of the nineteenth century, Fourth Ward grew even as segregation became more entrenched. In 1870, the first black public school, Gregory Institute, opened on Victor Street, to be followed by others, all with Black teachers instructing the Black students. Houston public schools for white students opened about the same time.<sup>18</sup>

Private libraries (for whites) existed from the beginning of the city. Now, time had come for a public library.



The Houston Lyceum, itself closed to women until 1887, working with the Ladies Reading Club and the Women's Club, and with financial support from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, negotiated the construction of an Italian Renaissance structure on the east corner of Travis and McKinney. On March 3, 1904, the Carnegie Library opened its doors to the public—to the white public.



On March 3, 1904, the Carnegie Library, Houston's first public library, opened its doors on the corner of Travis and McKinney. In 1926, the Library moved into the larger Julia Ideson Building at 500 McKinney. The First Presbyterian Church, the site's original owner, repurchased the land.

Andrew Carnegie similarly extended his generosity to Houston's African American community, but later. The Houston Public Library had provided a small but inadequate branch. Community leaders wanted, and got, more. In 1913, the Colored Carnegie Branch of the Houston Public Library on Frederick Street opened its doors.<sup>19</sup>

While the Third and Fifth Wards were attracting most new African American residents, the Fourth Ward continued dominant as the center of African American business and professional activity. *The Red Book of Houston*, a survey of "Houston's colored population" published in 1915, gives an extensive listing, covering activities from attorneys to undertakers and wood dealers. The frequent occurrence of San Felipe Road addresses indicates that it continued as the retail and service artery, home to barbershops, furniture and dry goods stores, and two of the three undertakers. Not surprisingly, grocers were more dispersed.

One enterprise was not present on San Felipe Road or in any of the wards other than the Fourth. Professionals. Black professionals gathered to do business in sight of Market Square, primarily in the 400 blocks of Milam and Travis, with some on connecting Prairie. Of the seven physicians including the well-known B. J. Covington, all but one practiced there. C. A. George had his dental office on Milam, while J. L. Cockrell did his drilling on Travis. Lawyers and notaries joined in, as did insurance companies, a contractor and builder, a job-printer/publisher, and several realtors.


A thriving support community prospered as well. Not surprisingly, two druggists did business in the neighborhood. Bayou City Drugstore sat between Dr. Covington and the Bayou City Café. A couple of tailors and several barbers kept the men in trim. Today, these blocks on Milam and Travis lie vacant, shorn even of their buildings, offer-

ing parking for theater patrons as they wait for their next Houston incarnation.<sup>20</sup>

Market Square is still a gathering place, but as a park, not a teeming market. This original focal point of the Fourth Ward seems a world away from today's Fourth Ward of Freedmen's Town and Gregory School west of I-45 and south of Buffalo Bayou. The distance is only about a mile.

This "old" Fourth Ward, now a part of greater "downtown," continues to bustle and change. Buildings go down. Buildings go up. Buildings change. The Rice Hotel, home to much of Texas history, is now residential—the Rice Lofts. Heritage Plaza, one of the tallest, and certainly, most dramatic skyscrapers in Houston, recently sold for a reported \$325 million, one of the largest sales in downtown real estate history. Another world away indeed.<sup>21</sup>

Only a block or so away from Heritage Plaza, however, these worlds come together under the very shadow of I-45 in Sam Houston Historic Park. There, one of Houston's oldest homes welcomes her transplanted Fourth Ward neighbors. Nathaniel K. Kellum built the house in 1847 for his fifteen-year-old bride, Elmira Cotton, using bricks made on the site. Later, when owned by the Noble family, it housed a school. Today, the historic home, the oldest in Houston occupying its original site, anchors the park. Nearby sits the home of the legendary Jack Yates, moved to the site from its original location on Andrews Street in 1994. In 2002, a Fourth Ward cottage joined the two. It is typical of the more modest homes in the area, an example of a "working man house," perhaps the home of a man who learned his skills under Yates and his school's tutelage.<sup>22</sup>

Now, in the twenty-first century this is an ideal place to listen to the traffic on I-45, admire a stunning view of the Houston skyline, and contemplate the two worlds of the Fourth Ward. 



Cars hurry south on I-45, the Gulf Freeway, as downtown skyscrapers led by temple-topped Heritage Plaza stand sentry over the other world of Fourth Ward's Freedmen's Town.

Photo by Robert Pando.

**Patricia (Trilla) 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. She lives in Houston.

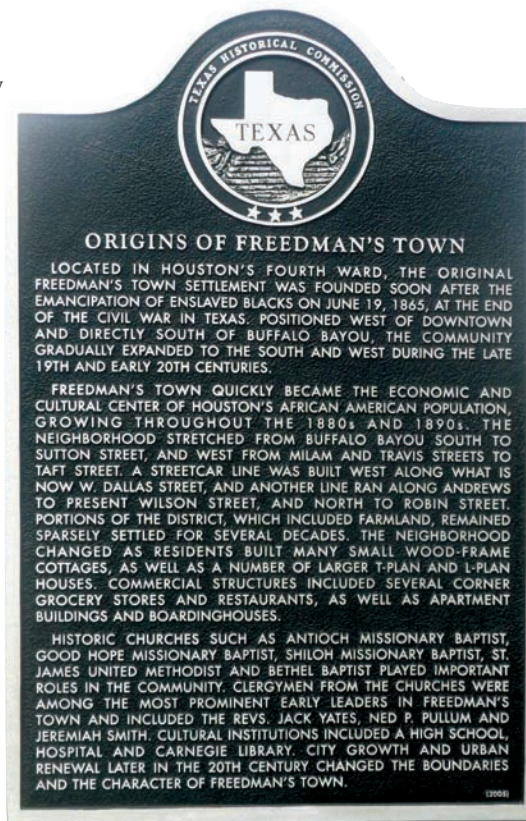


# FREEDMEN'S TOWN, TEXAS: A LESSON IN THE FAILURE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

By Tomiko Meeks

The struggle to preserve the history of Freedmen's Town in Houston, Texas, is entangled in the questionable systems of urban renewal and development, which inevitably work to displace many of the poor African American residents from the community. For nearly forty years, African Americans have been systematically forced from their neighborhood to make room for new construction as more people move back into the city. Freedmen's Town, because of its recognition as a "Historic District," on the National Register of Historic Places, should be immune to such actions. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Political figures, community groups, developers, the legal system, and preservation projects have all failed on varying levels to protect the historical value and integrity of Freedmen's Town.

Freedmen's Town has a long and distinctive history, worthy of preservation, that reaches back into late nineteenth century Houston. With the Civil War over and with the enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation, freed slaves came to Houston and took decisive measures to assert and protect their freedom. Although other ethnic groups lived in Freedmen's town, it holds prominence as the first independent Black neighborhood in Houston. In January 1866, only seven months after slaves became free in Texas, "a group of freed slaves organized the first African American Baptist Church in Houston, Texas." The congregation held some of their earliest services on Buffalo Bayou in a "Brush Arbor." They later moved to "Baptist Hill" located at Rusk and Bagby. In 1868, the congregation purchased property on Clay, reportedly "some of the first property owned by Black Houstonians." Reverend Jack Yates became the first official pastor of Antioch. Yates urged Blacks to buy land and build homes. Yates also founded Houston College in 1885, where he taught Blacks homebuilding skills, such as masonry and carpentry. The college evolved into Texas Southern University. The Gregory Institute opened its doors in 1870 under orders of the Texas Legislature to educate African American students and in 1876 became a part of Houston Independent School District. Other instrumental Black institutions, such as the Carnegie Colored Library, were also located in Freedmen's



*The marker at Dallas and Heiner streets commemorates the once bustling Freedmen's Town, much of which has been destroyed despite its designation as a Historic District.* Photo courtesy of author.

Town before its demolition to make way for I-45 in 1959.

The original boundaries of Freedmen's Town according to 1875 plat maps included twenty-eight blocks inside of Fourth Ward on the southern banks of Buffalo Bayou, north of San Felipe Road, and west of the city's center. Soon Freedmen's Town became the center of opportunity and advancement for freed slaves. The community played a critical role in the Black experience in Houston, known throughout Houston's African American community as the "mother ward." By 1915, over four hundred Black owned businesses existed in Freedmen's Town. The presence of these institutions gave the community stability and tells the story of newfound opportunities for land and homeownership among Blacks. In 1920, Freedmen's Town represented one-third of Houston's population approximately eighty-five thousand people. The commercial strip, an area along West Dallas, housed jazz clubs, eateries, and other businesses. The National Register of Historic Places lists several night clubs, beauty shops, and the Rainbow



*Nine former slaves organized Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, Houston's first African American Baptist Church, in 1866. The sanctuary shown in the above picture was originally one-story and designed by church member Richard Allen.*

Photo courtesy of author.





*Reverend Jack Yates, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church, stands in the center of the group posed in front of the “Little School,” circa 1880s. To the right of Rev. Yates wearing a white shirt and dark jacket, is Rutherford B. H. Yates who founded Yates Printing Company in the 1920s.*

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

Theater as places that contributed to the area’s status as the “Harlem of the South.”

Just as quickly as Freedmen’s Town blossomed into a sustainable community, various factors contributed to its decline. In the mid 1930s, city and federally funded redevelopment programs targeted the area. The programs fractured the once stable and thriving community and continued on a trajectory that displaced Black residents of Freedmen’s Town. In 1937, eminent domain laws, which give government agencies the power to take private property for public use, provided a new way for government agencies to extract land from Blacks.

Between 1939 and 1942, the Federal Housing Administration built San Felipe Courts, an all white public housing project for World War II veterans, in the heart of Freedmen’s Town. Eminent domain laws allowed the Housing Authority to appropriate over thirty-seven acres, covering more than one-quarter of the land in Freedmen’s Town—marking a long history of moves to take land away from Blacks. During the excavation of the housing project site, 928 bodies were dug up and re-interred in a white cemetery, with little regard for the historical significance of the site. This episode in Freedmen’s Town’s history indicated that preserving this particular history did not concern the City of Houston. The mistakes carried over into the late 1950s when 40,000 residents were uprooted for the construction of the Pierce Elevated section of Interstate 45.

In 1966, with the passage of the National Historic

Preservation Act (NHPA), a glimmer of hope came for residents of Freedmen’s Town. Its mission of reuse and rehabilitation transformed many urban and rural spaces into economically viable historic districts. The act established the basic mechanics for historic preservation and community redevelopment. Houston, like other U.S. cities, recognized the need to protect historic neighborhoods. In her article “Historic Preservation in Houston ... A History?” Minnette Boesel states, “the city responded in the same fashion as other cities and established non-profit organizations dedicated to preserving history.” The city was, however, at the proverbial back of the line in passing a city ordinance that empowered the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission to identify, preserve, and protect historic districts and landmarks.

By the late 1970s, the City of Houston vied for more land in hopes of providing living space for citizens who worked in the downtown area. The prime target: Freedmen’s Town. Situated between Downtown, Montrose, and River Oaks, city planners developed a master plan for Freedmen’s Town that included demolishing dilapidated homes, razing Allen Parkway Village, and selling properties to developers and transforming the once thriving Black neighborhood into another upscale neighborhood. The factors of downtown development and Black flight made Freedmen’s Town excellent fodder for redevelopment sans historic preservation. During his tenure, Mayor Fred Hofheinz described Freedmen’s Town as a “living coffin” justifying redevelopment.



*Bar-B-Q restaurant circa 1950s, located at 407 Dallas St.*

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

ment based on his claim that “people are moving out of the area” and “it would be unintelligent for us to put the area at the top of our lists of priorities.” By 1984, it became clear to residents that gentrification had become an unavoidable reality, diminishing the cultural and historical unity within the community.

In 1978, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church fought a battle for its very existence—demonstrating the desire of residents to preserve their community. The Cullen Center pressured the church to sell them the land. The church’s congregation refused and fought to protect its historical legacy. They applied and received historic designation on the National Register of Historic Places, the first property in Freedmen’s Town to receive the designation.

Five years after Freedmen’s Town initial petition for historic designation, the National Park Service (NPS) designated a forty-block area of Fourth Ward as a National Historic District. The boundaries of the area included West Dallas Street to the North, Valentine Street to the South, Genessee Street to the West, and Victor Street to the East. Ideally the designation of Freedmen’s Town as a historic district should have changed the terms by which the city dealt with the predominantly Black community. Residents could work toward rehabilitating historic buildings, and the entire district would become eligible for federal funding. Unfortunately, the city had no interest in obtaining federal monies that would help maintain the history of the neighborhood.

In 1995, seventeen years after Antioch received the first historic site designation in Freedmen’s Town, it seemed the city finally understood the importance of historic preservation. The Houston City Council adopted two ordinances to protect historic structures. The first ordinance gave the city limited authority over the modification of historic struc-

tures. The second provided tax breaks to property owners who restored historic buildings

The important question to be answered is why preservation failed in Freedmen’s Town. Mistakes started in the late 1930s and early 1940s and continued through the last half of the twentieth century. Developers and city planners played their part, expanding the boundaries of downtown Houston further into Freedmen’s Town, theoretically believing they were removing blight and giving residents a better Houston. In order for historic preservation to work and benefit all involved, city government, developers, citizens, and community organizations should, at the very least, understand the importance of preservation and how it affects the stability of the city as a whole.

In other cities across the United States, the appropriate uses of the National Historic Preservation Act are touted as great successes in our nation. However, in Freedmen’s Town, the use of historic preservation has shifted between protecting the cultural heritage of freed slaves and stopping gentrification. Groups, many pursuing agendas which have little to do with the spirit of historic preservation, banded together pursuing legal provisions largely incremental or symbolic in nature, while historic buildings were systematically felled by bulldozers. In their wake, luxury living accommodations, new restaurants, parking lots, and other structures that are devoid of historical significance continued to be built. The lesson: without strong preservation ordinances in place, the destruction of valuable historical landmarks will continue and once they are gone, they will not miraculously return. [QR](#)

**Tomiko Meeks** is a master's student in public history at the University of Houston and graduate assistant for the Energy Management and Policy Group (EMAP).



# News Updates & Books by Barbara Eaves

## HISTORY NOTES



The fight for Texas Independence began with the first shot fired on October 2, 1835, in Gonzales and ended with the victory at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. In between, numerous events and skirmishes became

important parts of Texas' glorious history. Here are a few commemorative "events and skirmishes" planned nearby.

**THROUGH DECEMBER 31**, pick up a *Passport to Texas History* at any passport site (San Jacinto Museum of History is the closest) and relive events of the Texas Revolution by visiting sites at Gonzales, San Felipe, San Antonio, Washington-on-the-Brazos, Goliad, and La Porte. Each place will stamp your book. Collect stamps from all the sites by the end of 2011 and receive a commemorative gift.

[www.txindependence175.org](http://www.txindependence175.org).



**BATTLE REPORTS** – On March 11, 1836, Sam Houston arrived at Gonzales to take command of the Texas Army, launching the campaign that culminated in the Battle of San Jacinto and Texas' independence. On March 11, 2011, the Harris County Historical Commission launched a website issuing daily dispatches tracking the movement of the Texan and Mexican armies across Texas. Commissioner David Pomeroy is the reporter. For daily battle reports, visit [www.historicalcommission.hctx.net](http://www.historicalcommission.hctx.net).

**APRIL 9 – RUNAWAY SCRAPE:** Join fellow Texians at the George Ranch and flee Santa Anna's army as it marches toward San Jacinto. 10215 FM 762, Richmond, TX. Contact: Jennifer Farrell at [jfarrell@fortbendmuseum.org](mailto:jfarrell@fortbendmuseum.org), 281-343-0218.

**APRIL 16 – BATTLE OF SAN JACINTO SYMPOSIUM:** Four outstanding speakers discuss *The Legacy of San Jacinto* on the historical development of the United States, Texas and Mexico, and the cultural heritage of the battle through its depiction in artwork. Speakers are Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dr. Daniel Walker Howe; the Hon. Romeo Ricardo Flores Caballero of Monterrey, Mexico, former member of Mexico's Congress; Dr. Ty Cashion, professor of history at Sam Houston State University; and Dr. Sam DeShong Ratcliffe, of the Hamon Art Library at SMU. The Symposium is sponsored by the Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground. The \$55 fee covers lunch and parking. Hilton University of Houston Hotel & Conference Center, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. [www.friendsofsanjacinto.org](http://www.friendsofsanjacinto.org).

**APRIL 16 – SAN JACINTO FESTIVAL & BATTLE REENACTMENT:** The San Jacinto Battleground will host history demonstrators, music, and craft vendors, culminating at 3:00 p.m. in the state's largest reenactment

honoring those who fought for independence. The event is free. Modest charges apply inside the San Jacinto Monument to visit the Observation Deck and view *Texas Forever!!* or special exhibits. [www.sanjacinto-museum.org](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org).

**APRIL 19 – YELLOW ROSE BALL:** The Sons of the Republic of Texas will sponsor a replica of the formal ball held in 1837 to celebrate the victory at San Jacinto. The 2011 ball will be held in the Rice Hotel, site of the 1837 capitol building and first ball. Profits go to the San Jacinto Museum and the SRT's program to honor the "sailor of the year" serving on the USS *Texas* nuclear sub. Contact Ron Brown, 713-621-5660, or [rwbrown1@gmail.com](mailto:rwbrown1@gmail.com).

**APRIL 21 – LONE STAR MONUMENT & HISTORICAL FLAG PARK:** Dr. Charles B. Stewart of Montgomery County created the Lone Star Flag, designated Texas' official flag in 1839. Governor George Bush proclaimed Montgomery County the birthplace of the flag in 1997. At 5:30 p.m., April 21, the grand opening of the Lone Star Monument and Historical Flag Park will follow a parade from downtown Conroe to the intersection of I-45 and FM105. [www.texasflagpark.org/index.htm](http://www.texasflagpark.org/index.htm).

**APRIL 21 – BATTLE OF SAN JACINTO COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONY:** The official state ceremony to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle will begin at 11:00 a.m. at the San Jacinto Monument. Contact [Nburch2@juno.com](mailto:Nburch2@juno.com).

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**CITY OF HOUSTON** celebrates its 175<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011 too. Plans begin with a kickoff week late August and run through June 5, 2012, the anniversary of the city's incorporation. [www.AIAHouston.org](http://www.AIAHouston.org).

**HARRIS COUNTY'S** 1910 landmark courthouse restoration is scheduled for completion by mid-year with a public dedication to follow. The monumental staircases to second floor entrances on Fannin and San Jacinto, the dome, and central rotunda will be reconstructed. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Courts of Appeals chambers will be restored to their full two-story height (where married women and minorities watched cases in the past). See the Fall 2007 *Houston History* for Tiffany Schreiber's article about this \$65 million project.

## BOOKS

*The Great Storm: The Hurricane Diary of J. T. King, Galveston, Texas 1900*, by Lisa Waller Rogers (2010, \$14.95).

A teenage boy, the fictional J. T. King, keeps a diary of events of the factual hurricane that struck Galveston, Texas, in 1900, and the factual rescue operations that followed. This largest natural disaster in American history transforms an



ordinary boy's life into something heroic – a thrilling story for fifth to eighth graders. The 1900 Storm killed as many as 8,000 and pounded the city to rubble. This is the second in Rogers' Lone Star Journal series. Others are: *Remember the Alamo: The Runaway Scrape Diary of Belle Wood: Austin's Colony, Texas 1835-1836*; and *Get Along, Little Dogies: The Chisholm Trail Diary of Hallie Lou Wells: South Texas, 1878*. A blank book accompanies the series for those wishing to keep their own diary.



**Myth, Memory and Massacre: The Pease River Capture of Cynthia Ann Parker**, by Paul H. Carlson and Tom Crum (2010, \$29.95).

In comparing facts and myths of the Battle of Pease River and the 1860 recapture of Cynthia Ann Parker, the authors contend that the skirmish on Mule Creek was *not* a major battle that broke Comanche military power, but it was a twenty-minute fight between

fewer than forty Texans and a small Comanche hunting camp. After the battle, just seven bodies were found—mostly women—and the Texans took Parker, her daughter, and a boy as prisoners. Over the years, legend expanded the Comanche force to as many as 600, which possibly helped Texas Ranger captain Lawrence Sullivan “Sul” Ross win seventy-eight percent of the vote for governor. Carlson is professor emeritus of history at Texas Tech University; Crum is a retired state district judge.

**IDESON AWARD** – *Houston's Silent Garden: Glenwood Cemetery 1871-2009* (Texas A&M) by Suzanne Turner and Joanne Seale with photos by Paul Hester won the 2010 Julia Ideson Award given annually by the Friends of the Texas Room to the best work using the Houston Metropolitan Research Center collections. The runner-up was *The Hogg Family and Houston: Philanthropy and the Civic Ideal* by Kate Sayen Kirkland (UT Press, 2009). Entries must be submitted by June 1, 2011. Contact Dorothy Knox Houghton at [Dorothy\\_houghton@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Dorothy_houghton@sbcglobal.net).

## WATCH FOR

Steven Fenberg's biography of Jesse Jones (Texas A&M), due out in September, and Virginia Bernhard's book, *Ima Hogg: The Governor's Daughter*, coming this spring from the Texas State Historical Association. The cover book on Texas A&M's spring's catalogue is Susie Kalill's *Alexandre Hogue: An American Visionary*. Hogue, whose career spanned the 1920s to his death in 1994, held the view that America considered high art and great ideas accessible to ordinary working people.

## EVENTS

**BAYOU CITY NOIR: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF MARVIN ZINDLER**, a collaboration of the Museum of Printing History and Houston Arts & Media, is on display March 24 to August 13. It spotlights the days when Marvin Zindler was a crime photographer for the daily *Houston Press* (before he became “Maaarvin Zindler, Eyewitness

News”), when big city journalism captured the drama of the day and Houston was known as the nation's murder capital. Admission is free. The museum is at 1324 West Clay and open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**THE HERITAGE SOCIETY** – Furniture, pottery, and decorative art pieces initially created by frontier Texans to “make do” are now actively collected and proudly displayed. April 19 to September 4, the Heritage Society will showcase an exhibit of such objects from its permanent collection and private holdings that represent the diverse culture of frontier Texas. [www.heritatesociety.org](http://www.heritatesociety.org).

**GREATER HOUSTON PRESERVATION ALLIANCE** celebrates Houston's 175th birthday with a year of tours tracing the city's development. They include: Market Square, Courthouse district and Quality Hill, early suburbs including the Old Sixth Ward and Woodland Heights, and the modern architecture of the University of St. Thomas and Menil campus. [www.ghpa.org/tours](http://www.ghpa.org/tours).

**HOUSTON MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE** – Through September 5, *Texas Making History since 1519*, an exhibition exploring the role Texas played as a Spanish colony, Mexican *Frontera*, Independent Republic, and twenty-eighth state will have objects from collections across Texas, including the Alamo, Goliad, San Jacinto, and Gonzales. [www.hmns.org](http://www.hmns.org).

## APPOINTMENTS

Landscape architect and historian **Janet K. Wagner** was named chair of the Harris County Historical Commission, which is appointed by the Harris County Commissioners Court and works to preserve, protect, and promote county history. Wagner succeeds **Patrick Van Pelt**, who, during his two terms as chairman, hosted the state meeting in Houston last summer. [www.historicalcommission.hctx.net](http://www.historicalcommission.hctx.net).



**William H. Kellar, Ph.D.**, a professional historian, teacher, and writer, was named president of the **Houston History Association** and appointed a member of the **Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission**. [www.houstonhistoryassociation.org](http://www.houstonhistoryassociation.org) or [www.houstontx.gov/histpres/aboutHAHA.html](http://www.houstontx.gov/histpres/aboutHAHA.html).

Affiliated with the UH-Center for Public History and president of HistoryConsultants.Net, Kellar has written or co-authored ten books on subjects related to Houston history, the Texas Medical Center, and local businesses. His most recent, *Ophthalmology at Hermann Hospital and The University of Texas, Houston*, discusses the development of eye care here and the creation of the Hermann Eye Center.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Houston History* magazine invites you to visit its new website: [www.houstonhistorymagazine.org](http://www.houstonhistorymagazine.org). Featured are articles from the latest issue as well as selected items from previous ones.



**SAVE TEXAS HISTORY** – Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson has championed *Save Texas History*, an initiative to offset costs of preserving thirty-five million historic maps and documents at the Texas General Land Office used every day for land title, genealogical, and historical research. Map sales are critical in this effort. High-quality reproductions of hand-drawn maps from pre-Republic days to statehood, city, county, and subdivision maps are sold online and at events, all searchable on the GLO website. The staff offers tours of the map vault; “This Week in Texas History” is a radio feature; the “Texas Travels” essay contest for fourth and seventh graders is sponsored by Southwest Airlines. The second *Save Texas History Symposium* is planned for October 2011. Request the newsletter or contribute at [www.savetexashistory.org](http://www.savetexashistory.org); order a map at [www.glo.texas.gov/what-we-do/history-and-archives/index.html](http://www.glo.texas.gov/what-we-do/history-and-archives/index.html).

**SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND LAND** – Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground acquired nineteen-plus acres of property south of Lynch’s Ferry from the John M. O’Quinn estate, land original to the battlefield but outside the state-owned historic site. The acreage was a tactical focal point for the Mexican and Texan armies before the battle and on the escape route for Texan colonists during



*Directors Charlie Duke (left) and George R. Gayle III hang the “Friends of San Jacinto Battleground” banner after the group bought the O’Quinn acreage recently.*

the Runaway Scrape. The Friends hopes to reconstruct the wild natural vista so that visitors today can better visualize the scenery and battle events. Funding is needed. Contact [www.friendsofsanjacinto.org](http://www.friendsofsanjacinto.org) or Jan DeVault at 713-237-8997.

**HOUSTON ARTS & MEDIA (HAM)** completed a documentary titled *Houston: A Nation’s Capital* that will be

part of a series of feature-length documentaries, *Birth of Texas*, covering Mexican Texas until statehood. The first DVD is available through HAM. For a viewing schedule visit [www.houstonartsandmedia.org](http://www.houstonartsandmedia.org). Contact [info@houstonartsandmedia.org](mailto:info@houstonartsandmedia.org) or Mike Vance at 713-686-9244.

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## THE BATTLE FOR BAYTOWN

- 1 Henrietta Larson and Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *History of Humble Oil and Refining Company* (New York: Harper and Brother Publishing, 1959), 66-77, 350-389; Harvey O'Connor, *History of Oil Workers International Union* (Denver: A. B. Hirschfeld Press, 1950), 114-117.
- 2 James C. Maroney, "The Texas-Louisiana Oil Field Strike of 1917," in *Essays in Southern Labor History: Selected Papers, Southern Labor History Conference, 1976*, Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 161-172; Larson, *Humble Oil*, 66-71.
- 3 William Lyon Mackenzie King, *Industry and Humanity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), xi-xii; Robert Dunn, *Company Unions: A Study of Employee Representation Plans, Works Councils and Other Substitutes for Labor Unions* (Chicago: Trade Union Educational League, 1927), 5.
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