

Houston HISTORY

VOLUME 9 • NUMBER 3 • SUMMER 2012

Houston Parks—Where Memories are Made



UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

POSTCARDS FROM PAST PARKS



SUMMER 1972: Driving from Quebec to Boston. Suzy and I slept in the Rambler last night on the side of a deserted road in the middle of Maine. No cars passed in the night, but a big moose moseyed by early this morning. Today we made it to our first national park ever—

Acadia, with its spectacular rugged shoreline. Great campground with a bottle of wine and neighbors playing Neil Young's new *Harvest* album. Big kids loose in a big world.

SUMMER 1973: Heading back to Baltimore with Suzy's little brother in tow. Camped last night near the bottom of Shenandoah National Park at the best site ever. Sat on the rocks on one mountain ridge looking across the Shenandoah River at a second ridge as the sunset turned the mist a deeper shade of blue. I feel like I lived here once and I will live here again.

SPRING 1978: A perfect day at the prettiest place on earth. Had a picnic in Yosemite Valley on the meadow near the Tuolumne River with waterfalls roaring on all sides. Our new daughter smiled as our old Golden Retriever Gretchen jumped in the river. Welcome to the best of our world, Baby Kate.

SPRING 1979: Drove from Berkeley to Yosemite yesterday with Suzy's parents. It was evening all afternoon. It was snowing and it was going to snow. Took a solitary walk as a blue day dawned on fresh snow in Yosemite Valley. Among snowy mountains the only thing moving was a wolf that watched me from afar. This place must have been paradise before we arrived. (My apologies, Mr. Stevens.)

SUMMER 1979: Gretchen and I are looking for America on our drive from Berkeley to D.C. Arrived late at Grand Teton National Park, but found a camp site high up beside an ice cold lake. After a midnight swim, Gretchen kept me awake all night huddled up against me in the tent shivering and grunting. Today she snored loudly in the back seat as I made the long haul down from the mountains through Cody and on to Spearfish, with a spectacular detour to the Devil's Tower.

SUMMER 1993: We are at one of the coolest places we have ever visited: the Maho Bay tent campground on St. John in Virgin Island National Park. Clearest water, brightest colors, most lizards ever. Red Stripe anyone?

SPRING 2000: Four years ago Suzy and I took a sad trip to Rocky Mountain National Park after dumping freshman Kate off at Colorado College. Now I'm here alone at the YMCA Camp waiting to help move our new college graduate home to Texas. This morning I drove in the dark to Moraine Valley and took a seat high up in the rocks. A herd of elk grazed beneath me as the sun rose slowly over the mountains. The sky changed colors in every direction.

SUMMER 2001: This morning we left Badlands National Park on a narrow dirt road heading to the Pine Ridge Reservation. A big, old buffalo stood in the middle of the road: "None shall pass." We waited him out under a shade tree then drove on to the cemetery for the Sioux victims of the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. Buried with them at that sad place is a Native American activist killed in a protest there in 1973 after returning from a tour of duty in Vietnam. I cried.

WINTER 2002: We have had an exciting three weeks. First the USS *Arizona* Memorial, then a stay on the deserted island of Molokai, then a journey to the Big Island and Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, with its stunning lava flows. I will remember our whale watching trips off Maui the day I die; after that I hope to return here as a hump-back whale and entertain the tourists.

SUMMER 2005: Took the early animal-watching bus into Denali National Park this morning. Doesn't matter much—the sun never really goes down. Suzy was the champion animal spotter on the bus. We saw a grizzly stalking an elk, but it gave up and went looking for groundhogs instead. You can't always get what you want, but I have always wanted to be in Denali and I am finally here.

SUMMER 2006: Back at Glacier National Park, which we visited with Kate fifteen years ago. It's still stunning, but the glaciers are receding rapidly. I'm no expert on the science of climate change, but it scares me that this will soon be known as the National Park Formerly Known as Glacier. Going to the sun, indeed.

SUMMER 2010: We are on a whirlwind park tour with friends from Norway—Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, and the old lodge on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Suzy drove into Zion today. In a car full of 61 year olds, she is 62, the magic age to buy a senior pass: everyone in the car gets in free to every national park and monument. Time to retire.

Thank you!

All of us at *Houston History* wish to thank Blue Bell Creameries and The Heritage Society for sponsoring our ice cream social to launch our spring issue, "Tickle Your Taste Buds." The historic setting at The Heritage Society Museum and Sam Houston Park transported the guests back in time where they enjoyed delicious (and unbeatable) Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream with their favorite toppings. A great time was had by all.

Houston History supporters enjoy Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream in the Duncan Store at The Heritage Society at our April 2012 launch party.



Houston History

VOLUME 9 • NUMBER 3 SUMMER 2012

Houston Parks— Where Memories are Made

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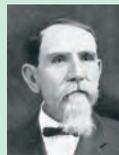
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Abelated Thank You ... We also want to express our appreciation to Anne Sloan and Jere Pfister who sponsored our first launch party at the Heights Woman's Club for the "Call to Worship" issue. This event enabled us to reach out to the community and jump-started a new tradition for the magazine. Thank you!

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Cover Photo: *Houston's historic Hermann Park, which will celebrate its centennial in 2014, has something for everyone.*
Photo courtesy of Hermann Park Conservancy.

Our Treasured Oasis: Preparing for a Century of Hermann Park, 1914-2014

By Eliza Wright



All photos courtesy of the Hermann Park Conservancy unless otherwise noted.

Entrance to Hermann Park, Houston, Texas



Houston's Hermann Park has been a treasured oasis of green and blue in the heart of the city since its opening nearly a century ago. George H. Hermann, industrialist, real estate investor, and one of Houston's first park commissioners, donated land for the park in June 1914, and his estate bequeathed additional acreage upon his death later in the year. Though hard to imagine today, at the time, the heavily forested area extended to Brays Bayou and had little development surrounding it, save for Rice Institute, established in 1912 on the edge of the prairie.¹

Nearly 100 years later, Hermann Park is located in one of Houston's busiest destination areas. With its proximity to the Texas Medical Center, the Houston Museum District, Rice University, and diverse residential neighborhoods, Hermann Park serves an estimated six million visitors a year who come to relax and play among its 445 acres. It is home to more than 8,000 trees, many of them nearly a century old that not only look beautiful but also provide cooler temperatures, cleaner air, shade, and a wildlife habitat.

In 1915, the city commissioned renowned St. Louis landscape architect George Kessler to create a master plan for Hermann Park, and many of his signature design ele-

◀ *The 1992 design competition for the Heart of the Park, the Hermann Park Conservancy's first major endeavor, caused the group to realize that a master plan was needed. The area includes the park's most iconic stretch from the Sam Houston Monument to the grand basin, now McGovern Lake. Landscaping around the Sam Houston Monument, added in 1925, was restored and the parking areas around it removed. Today, the rose beds in the Sara H. and John H. Lindsey Plaza greet visitors. Just beyond it is the Jones Reflection Pool with the O. Jack Mitchell Garden on the east. Mitchell, the late architect and former School of Architecture dean at Rice, was an inspiration for the Heart of the Park competition. The Molly Ann Smith Plaza surrounding the Pioneer Memorial obelisk delights children with its interactive water features. Since the obelisk, dedicated in 1936, stood several feet off center, a giant crane carefully raised and repositioned the monument to create the proper sight line from the Montrose axis to the lake.*⁶ Photo by David Schmall.

ments remain today: the main entrance at Montrose Boulevard and Main Street, the reflection pool, the grand basin (McGovern Lake today), the music pavilion (now Miller Outdoor Theatre), the paths and carriage trails, and the golf course. At the park's entrance, Kessler called for an elliptical sunken garden, later replaced by the Mecom Fountain in 1964. Many park features extended from the Montrose Boulevard axis with the visual line beginning at the park entrance and following along the reflection pool to the grand basin.²

After Kessler died in 1923, the Kansas City landscape architecture firm Hare & Hare took over the job for the next twenty-five years. They used aspects of Kessler's plan while adding elements like the zoo and garden center. The mid- to late-1960s saw the construction of the new Houston Museum of Natural Science and Miller

Outdoor Theatre.³

In the 1970s and 1980s as the park attracted larger crowds, new roads and parking lots addressed the growing traffic problem. Although aiding the congestion, these changes contributed to the park's decline as a recreational resource and shifted its identity to a series of empty spaces between institutions.⁴

Several community groups formed to revitalize the park. Joining forces in 1992, these park neighbors and friends created the Friends of Hermann Park, which later changed its name to Hermann Park Conservancy to better reflect its mission to improve the park and to conserve and steward its resources. Its founding spurred today's renaissance of Hermann Park. The Conservancy and the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department commissioned Philadelphia landscape architect Laurie Olin of Hanna/Olin to develop an updated plan to revive the historic park and guide its improvements. In 1997, Houston City Council adopted this plan, which has several goals to increase accessibility, restore the park's historical elements, encourage community activity by adding gathering spaces and increasing services, and maintain the park through stewardship programs.⁵

Collaborating with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, Hermann Park Conservancy has secured over \$98 million to date toward its \$121 million goal to complete the plan. Half has come from public funds, while generous individuals, foundations, and corporations have supplied the other half. The Conservancy manages all enhancement efforts, regardless of the funding source, to ensure cohesiveness.

Today Hermann Park stands as a testament to the value of philanthropy and community participation. Thanks to the generosity of everyone from George Hermann a century ago to today's donors and volunteers, Houston has an unparalleled recreational resource. As the city grows, Hermann Park offers its visitors a common ground to experience nature, bond as a diverse community, and connect with almost 100 years of Houston history.



◀ The creation of McGovern Lake, completed in 2001, nearly doubled the size of the grand basin. Its shallow edge design allows visitors to safely get a close-up look at the wetland plants, fish, and waterfowl. A fishing pier and benches along its perimeter give visitors shoreline spots from which to admire the view. The lake contains three islands, with one accessible to pedestrians. The other two serve as migratory bird islands, giving waterfowl and birds a place to nest and rest, whether making a permanent or temporary home in Hermann Park.⁷

Photo by Jay Baker.



▲ Renowned landscape architect Ken Nakajima designed the Japanese Garden. It opened in 1992 on five acres between the Fannin Street edge of the park and the Jones Reflection Pool. Following a visit by former Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, the Commemorative Association for the World Exposition donated the garden's Japanese teahouse, constructed by craftsmen from Japan without the use of nails or screws. Houston's sister city, Chiba, donated a stone lantern, positioned by a stone waterfall on the edge of the garden's lake. The garden took on a heavy Texas tilt because its caretakers lacked knowledge of Japanese landscaping principles. To restore the garden to its original intent, private funding has brought a landscape team from Japan to visit annually for the past six years. The garden has since become characteristic of the traditional Japanese style, and the staff has received training regarding proper care and pruning techniques.⁹

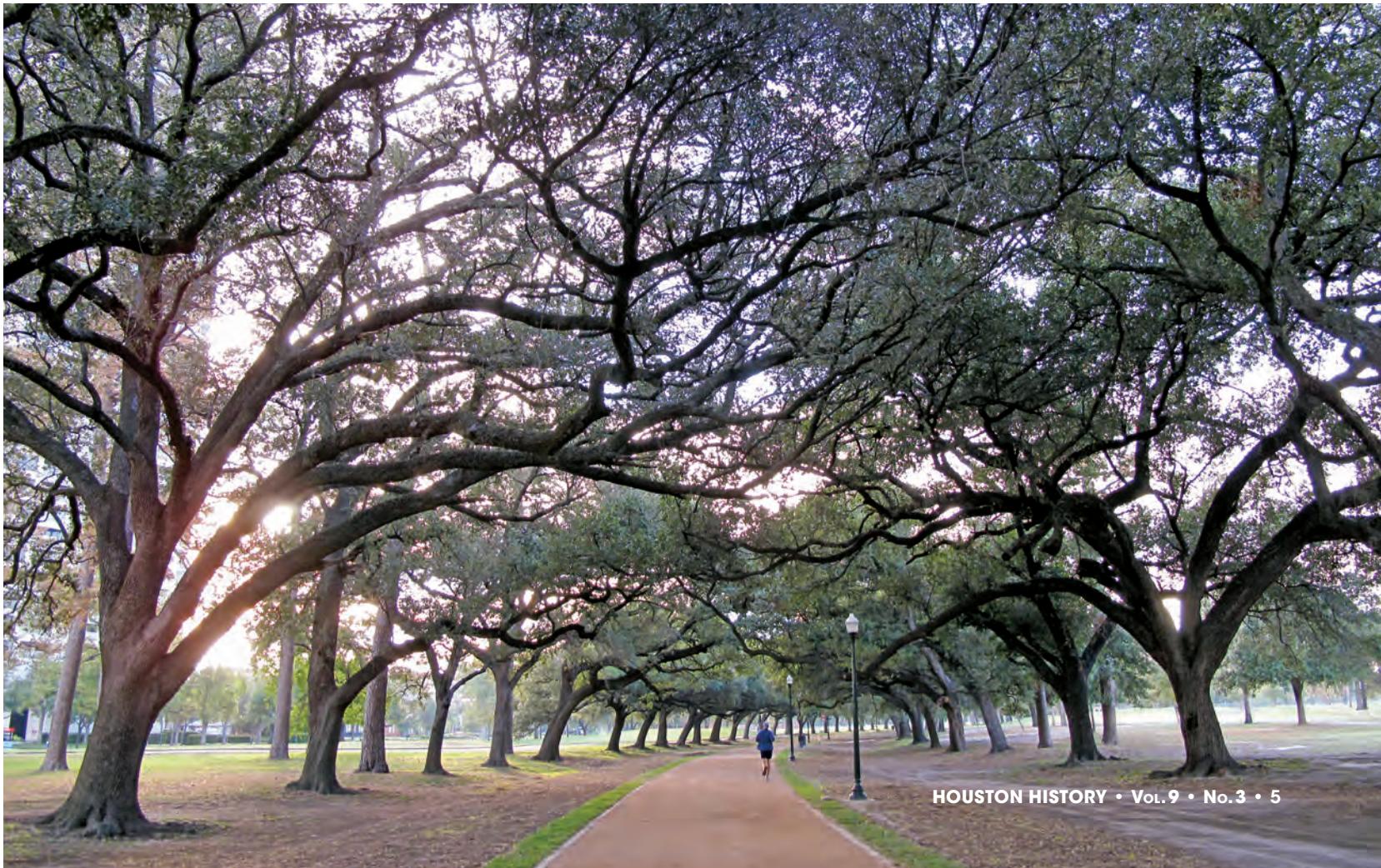
Part of Kessler's 1916 master plan, the reflection pool was installed but not completed according to his design. Decades later, the once elegant feature became a muddy pit with a jagged edge. Thanks to the Heart of the Park renovation, the Mary Gibbs and Jesse H. Jones Reflection Pool, completed in 2003, extends 740 feet long by 80 feet wide and features stone edges, a black bottom to maximize reflection, and a cascade feature at its north end. Single rows of mature live oaks historically lined the pool on each side and more were transplanted as part of the renovation to create double allées.⁸



◀ The popular Houston Zoo, located in Hermann Park, opened in late 1924. Designed by Hare & Hare, it stands where Kessler had originally planned to put athletic fields. The Aviary stood out as the zoo's largest structure when it was completed in 1926. Even though a hurricane later destroyed much of it, some features remain. The Aviary was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.

A major expansion of the zoo, also planned by Hare & Hare, opened in 1950. In 2000, Hermann Park Conservancy worked with the zoo to create a West Zoo Entrance and beautify North MacGregor Way to enhance access from the Texas Medical Center. Today, Houston Zoo, Inc., a non-profit organization, runs the fifty-five-acre zoo through a public-private partnership with the City of Houston.¹⁰

▼ Kessler's plan incorporated carriage trails for leisurely rides through the park. Today, runners and walkers enjoy their scenic, shaded paths. The 2010 rerouting of North MacGregor allowed the park to restore one historic carriage path for pedestrian use and now features a widened, decomposed granite surface, with lighting, and drainage. Some of the park's oldest and most majestic live oaks line these trails. Will C. Hogg donated 200 of these trees in memory of Harris County men who died in World War I. Today, the trees receive special care, particularly during extreme drought conditions, such as those experienced in 2011. Another historic carriage path follows Fannin, linking the George Hermann statue on the corner of Fannin and Cambridge to the park's main entry. The most convenient to METRORail, this path recently had new lighting installed, aiding those heading home from evening performances at Miller Outdoor Theatre.¹¹





▲ Completed in 2009, Lake Plaza sits on eight acres along the eastern edge of McGovern Lake adjacent to the main Houston Zoo entrance. Following Olin's master plan to create community gathering places, Lake Plaza maximizes the potential for the area as a civic space. Prior to the renovation, the area had minimal landscaping, a carport-like structure where patrons boarded the Hermann Park train, and portable restrooms. Today, it includes Kinder Station, The Tiffany & Co. Foundation Bridge, McGovern Promenade, a café, dining terrace, public restrooms, Conservancy gift shop, pedal boat lagoon, and a volunteer and maintenance building. Chosen for their sustainability, all of the plants in the plaza are native to the region, and new trees provide shade to strolling couples and children lining up to visit the zoo. The new buildings blend seamlessly into the park setting. The entire project is Gold LEED certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Photo by Scott Adams.

▼ A public art project in Lake Plaza reinforces the concepts of conservation and community. Local artist Jesse Lott integrated art objects and materials found around the city into the plaza's walkways. Photo by Scott Adams.



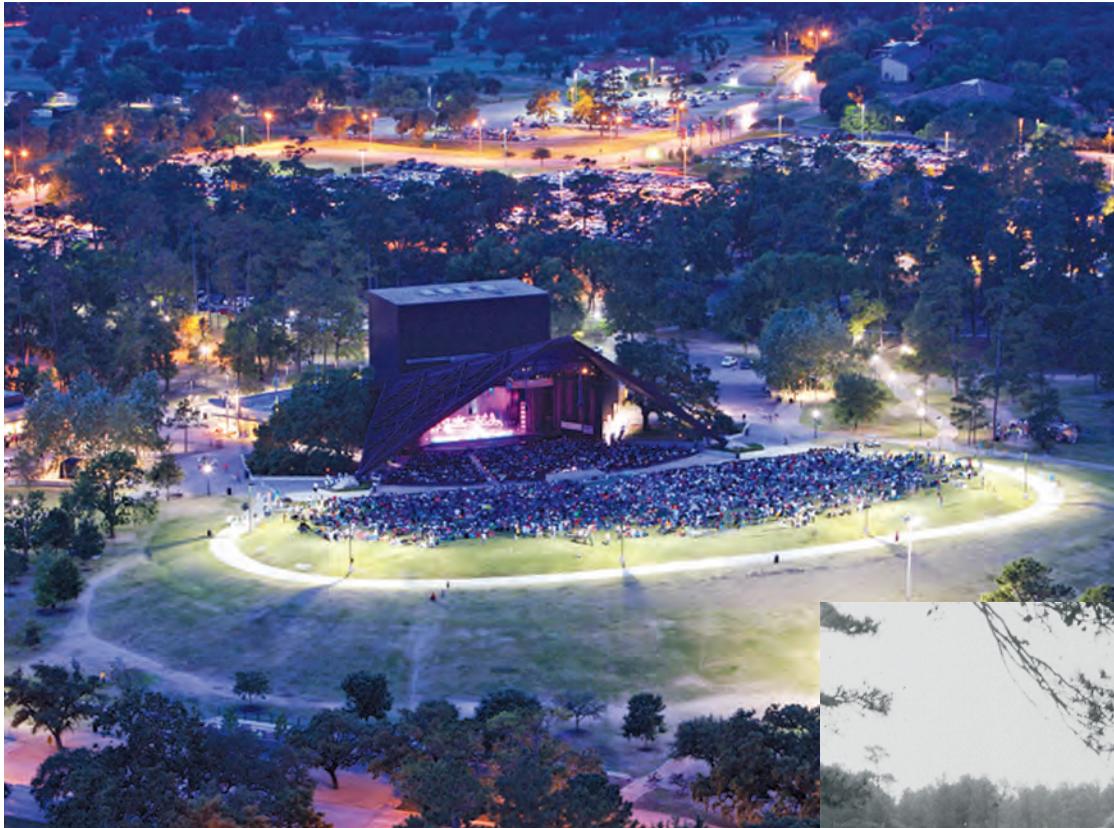
▲ The Mary Gibbs and Jesse H. Jones Greenway is a walking trail and waterway through the main Lake Plaza and Houston Zoo parking area. The bayou swale-style basin, full of lush plantings, collects water from the plaza, and filters pollutants before the water flows into Brays Bayou. It also holds water during heavy rainfall to reduce flooding and offers an enhanced wildlife habitat. From there, another greenway trail takes walkers through the golf course to Bayou Parkland, an eighty-acre urban forest separated from the formal center of the park by North and South MacGregor Ways. During the 1990s and 2000s, it underwent a revitalization that included construction of walking trails, boardwalks, and multi-use outdoor pavilion. Accessibility to Bayou Parkland will increase with the new Bill Coats Bike Bridge over Brays Bayou scheduled to open in late summer 2012. It will connect cyclists and pedestrians to trails along the bayou on both sides, giving visitors convenient walking access to Bayou Parkland and its amenities from the main body of the park.¹²



Engineer David M. Duller and Houston golfer George V. Rotan designed the Hermann Park Golf Course as part of Kessler's original 1916 plan. It opened in 1922. One of the city's oldest and most popular municipal courses, it is also celebrated as one of the first public golf courses open to all races. BSL Corporation, which commissioned designer Carlton Gipson, renovated the course in 1999. A new clubhouse, in use today, was constructed at the corner of Almeda and North MacGregor, helping to alleviate traffic congestion within the park. Arthur E. Nutter designed the original Spanish colonial revival-style clubhouse in 1933. In 2006, the exterior of the historic clubhouse, shown here, was restored and the interior converted to fit the needs of an office staff. Today, it houses Parks Department and Hermann Park Conservancy offices.¹³



Photo by Nash Baker.



Dedicated in 1923, the park's original outdoor amphitheater was named Miller Memorial Theatre for its benefactor, Jesse Wright Miller, a mining engineer and cotton broker. Today, its original columns make up part of the Mecom-Rockwell Colonnade. Construction for the current Miller Outdoor Theatre began in 1967 on the site of the original theatre, and it opened in 1968. In the late 1990s, the Conservancy updated the building systems and expanded Miller's restroom facilities. New offices, a ticket kiosk, concessions, and landscaped plazas were added to accommodate the demands of its growing popularity. The theatre, which is an integral part of the park space, produces over 100 shows a year free of charge to the public.¹⁴

▲ Photo courtesy of Miller Outdoor Theatre.





◀ *The Hermann Park train has been a beloved park feature since 1957. The Conservancy took over the train's operation in 2008 after decades of its being run privately. New trains replaced the old with cleaner burning engines, handicap accessibility, and larger seats. The Conservancy extended the railroad to two miles, created Kinder Station as the main station in Lake Plaza, and added three new stops along the track. The additional stops make it easier for visitors to explore the park, encourage the use of METRORail, and accommodate visitors from the Texas Medical Center.¹⁵*

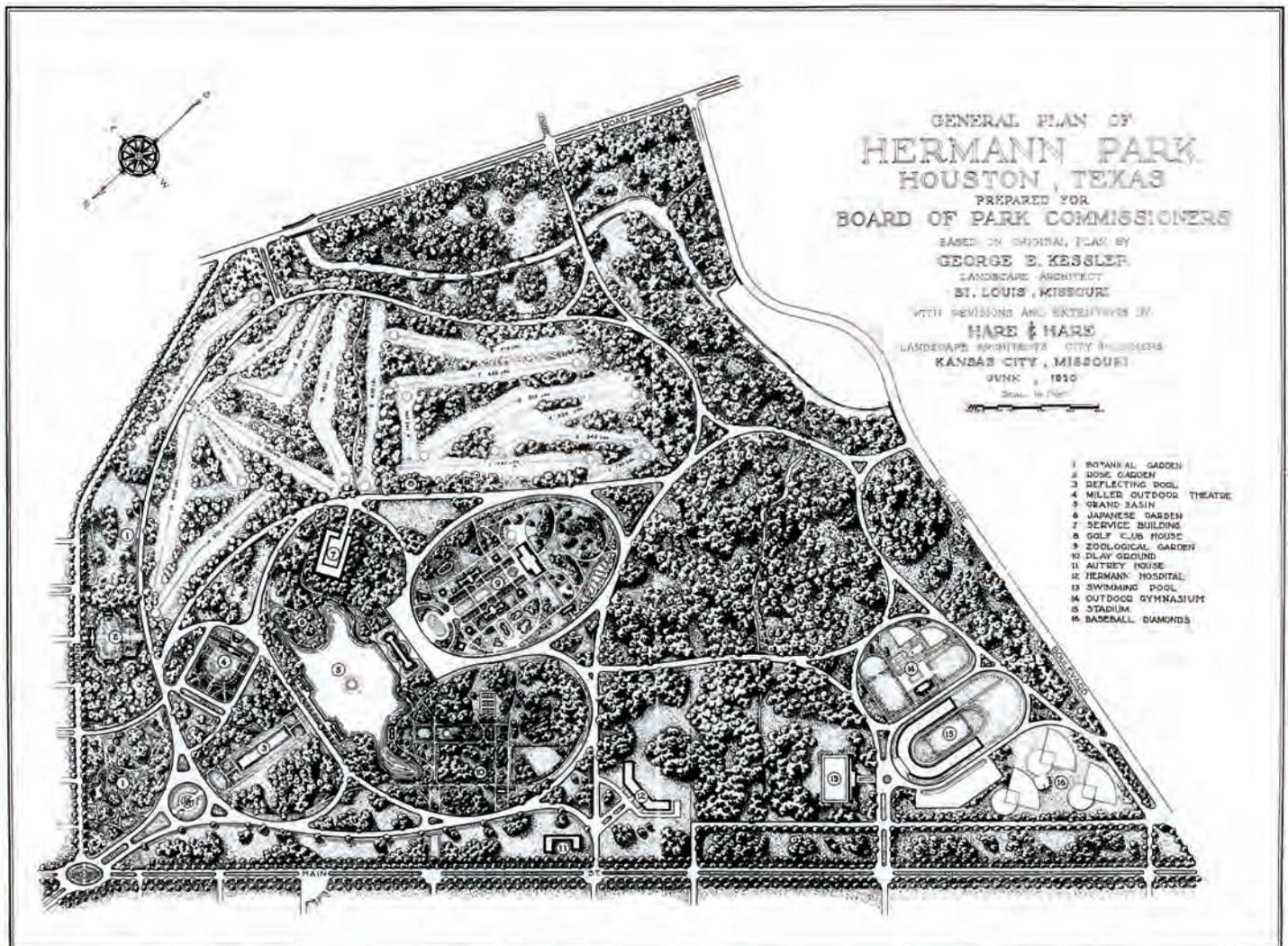
Photo by Nash Baker.

Completing a Treasure

Although many projects were completed in the last two decades, two more major components of the current master plan remain. The Conservancy hopes to reach substantial completion on these efforts in time for the park's centennial celebration in 2014. These monumental efforts include the renovation of the Grand Gateway, the historic main entrance to the park, and the complete transformation of the Garden Center, to be reborn as the Centennial Gardens. Similar to the improvements mentioned throughout this article, these projects will respect the historic aspects of the park's past while addressing modern needs. With continued community support, the master plan for Hermann Park will finally be complete—a fine 100th birthday present for a place that has meant so much to so many.

Eliza Wright is the marketing manager at Hermann Park Conservancy.

▼ *The June 1930 Hermann Park plan created by Hare & Hare based on George Kessler's original design.*



SPARK PARKS Spark the Imagination

By Kathleen Ownby



Travis Elementary is home to the Trivisauros created by local artist Paul Kittelson. Part of Houston ISD, the school has a Magnet/Vanguard Program and is located two miles north of downtown in the historic Woodland Heights neighborhood. Photo courtesy of Tom Callins Photography.

Although Houston may be known for its many cultural and art museums, the handiwork of local artists can also be found in a not-so-usual location – school and neighborhood SPARK Parks, which grew from one woman’s inspiration.

In 1979, Eleanor Tinsley beat a twenty-year incumbent and became the first woman elected to Houston City Council as an at-large member. During her tenure, she pioneered dozens of landmark ordinances and projects including: the Houston International Initiatives, the Houston READ Commission, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission, the 9-1-1 Emergency Network, the ordinance requiring children under eighteen to wear bicycle helmets, the smoking restriction ordinance, the W-A-T-E-R Fund, which helps pay water and sewer bills for the city’s elderly and impoverished, and the adoption of Houston’s sign ordinance.

Tinsley developed and implemented the SPARK School Park Program. In 1983, Houston needed 5,000 acres of parkland to compare favorably to other cities. The mayor and county judge commissioned a Green Ribbon Study to investigate how to increase Houston-Harris County’s park space. Council Member Tinsley gave the report to a summer intern who highlighted the suggestion to “make use of public school grounds.” The rest is history.



Four generations of the Tinsley family have enjoyed SPARK Parks, shown left to right: Lucy Elliott, Emily Ownby Elliott, who worked with SPARK from 2005 to 2006, SPARK founder Eleanor Tinsley, and SPARK’s executive director, Kathleen Tinsley Ownby.

Photo courtesy of Tom Callins Photography.

Council Member Tinsley had previously served as a trustee for the Houston Independent School District and knew the people who could make this idea happen. She served as the fourth woman president in 1972. She chaired the campaign committee that led to voter approval of the Houston Community College System. Most importantly, she grew up in a home where her father expressed his belief that churches should be used during the week and schools should be used on the weekend.

An inter-local agreement stipulated that the school district would maintain the property and improvements; the parks, however, would remain accessible to the community after school and on weekends. This represented a change in philosophy for many principals. In 1983, not all schools were open and welcoming to the community. The plan offered a way for schools and community members to develop an important relationship. SPARK is also unique as a financial joint venture between the private sector, school districts, and city, county, and federal governments.

As a result of this agreement, SPARK was formed in 1983 to create more green space and critically needed recreational areas by transforming public school grounds into neighborhood parks. Creating more park space is essential in a city where there are not enough parks to meet the growing population's needs.

In 1988, I moved back to Houston with my family having been in the Dallas and Tulsa areas for fifteen years. On my many trips home during that time, I knew that in order to "be with Mother, you went with Mother." My mother was Eleanor Tinsley, and I had accompanied her to several SPARK events. I decided to volunteer in her Council office as a way to get acclimated to life back in Houston. Very soon the assistant SPARK director decided to go back to teaching at the community college. The job was open, and Mother offered it to me. A part-time position was a perfect fit. I had a daughter in middle school, we were building a house, and I had spent lots of time serving on PTA and Garden Club activities. I jumped at the chance. After about a year, the founding director of SPARK, Goldie Waghalter, decided to focus entirely on Houston International

Initiatives, and I became the executive director.

One of the things I like best about my job of twenty-four years is the mix of people I work with, whether it is the school principal, the architect, the artist, the PTA/PTO volunteer, or the contractor. We try to finish a park between twelve and eighteen months, and seeing a project through from beginning to end is very rewarding. I also like knowing what is going on all over Houston, not just in my neighborhood.

SPARK arranges for professional architects to work with each school committee to develop a park design that best meets the needs of the school and neighborhood. The children of each school take part in the design and upkeep of their SPARK Park. Community involvement is a cornerstone of the SPARK program; officials believe that the children and community should feel a sense of ownership for the park.



Artists from Artist Boat portrayed Garfield Elementary's mascot, the Gators, on the entrance to this SPARK Park in Pasadena ISD. The theme of the entry gate is "Life on the Bayou."

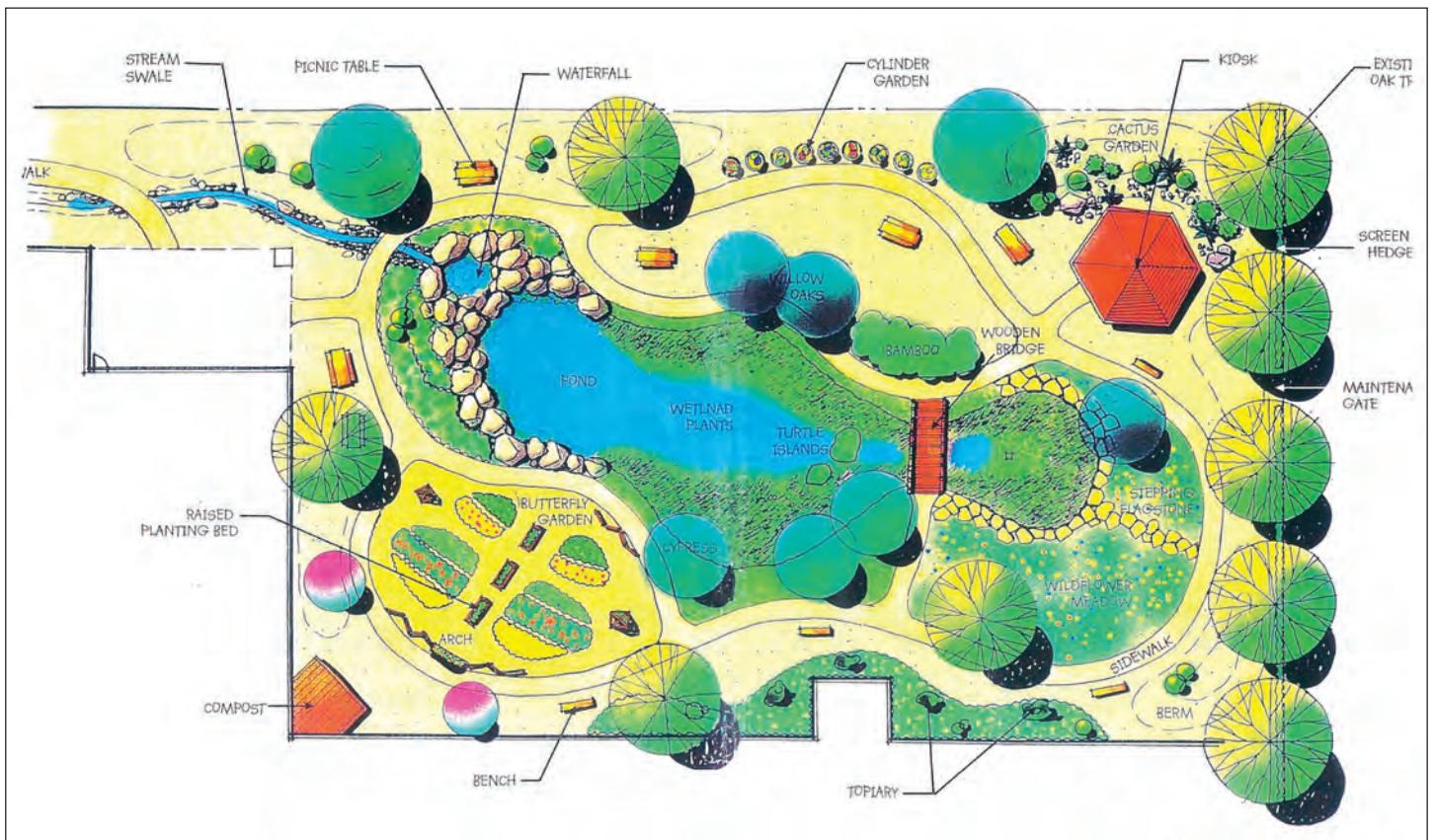
Photo courtesy of Artist Boat.

▼ Photo courtesy of Tom Callins Photography.





Spring Branch ISD's Meadow Wood Elementary park dedicated in December 2007 has the theme "United We Stand." Artist Rose Toro worked with students painting tiles. The plaza around the outdoor classroom features a chess checker board and a hopscotch board featuring the flags of the thirteen original states. Photo courtesy of Tom Callins Photography.



The SPARK Park dedication for Tinsley Elementary in Houston ISD was held in April 2004. What was originally a detention basin is now an environmental classroom complete with butterfly and cactus gardens, native plants, and a wetlands area with a solar-powered water pump. Photo courtesy of SPARK School Park Program.



The November 2011 dedication of Cornelius Elementary in Houston ISD represented a Re-SPARK of the original project. Linda Hinojos of Airbrush Specialties designed the chessboard. The school has an award-winning chess team and is a Magnet school for science, math, and technology.

Photo courtesy of SPARK School Park Program.

Community members can get involved in the project in many ways. Every school has a goal of raising \$5,000. Residents can contribute to projects aimed at achieving that goal. Students collect pennies, aluminum cans and newspapers, and sell candy, wrapping paper, and pickles. Community members can attend PTA and PTO events, such as silent auctions, carnivals, field days, golf tournaments, and spaghetti dinners. And they are even free to volunteer throughout the process, using their unique gifts to contribute to a park they will be proud to have. These efforts result in an empowered community very interested in the school their children attend.

While SPARK's main objective is to increase park space, the parks also help build a healthier community. Did you know that Houston is currently one of the "fattest" cities in America? Many students are more excited about watching TV or playing video games than exercising or playing outside, creating a health crisis in many underserved populations. For example, diabetes is a disease that is currently running rampant in low-income communities. On top of that, many parents fear sending their children to the neighborhood park because of safety issues, especially in neighborhoods that have gangs. SPARK Parks provide a safe place for students and their families to exercise and play outside in a location near their homes.

About half of the 180 SPARK Parks around the Houston area contain a public art component. Local artists, parents, and/or art teachers help with this piece of the park devel-

opment. Although world-renowned art museums abound in Houston, many children do not have the means to visit them. The parks' public art components expose young people to a variety of artistic opportunities. The art ranges from decorative tile archways to colorful ceramics and intricate mosaic designs.

SPARK Art enables local Houston artists to display their work in a public setting. Many schools have no art teacher to coordinate the art component of the park, so SPARK enlists a local artist. SPARK makes every attempt to match the ethnicity of the artist with that of the student body. Creation of this artwork provides an educational experience for the students as well as beautification for the neighborhood.

The sculptures at Travis Elementary School "Dinosaur" Park started with the imagination of Travis students in kindergarten through fifth grade when SPARK asked them to design their "ultimate playground." A huge dinosaur skeleton is the centerpiece of the park's play environment. Local sculptor Paul Kittelson created the innovative design of the huge dinosaur skeleton and faux archeological dig using student artwork.

Harlem Elementary School's SPARK Park was a project created in conjunction with the Museum of Cultural Arts, Houston. Artistic elements include a park entranceway sculpture designed by public artist and executive director of MOCAH, Reginald Adams. The concrete and tile mosaic sculpture depicts four children standing atop books while



Local artist Carter Ernst created over-sized books made with student tiles for Garden Oaks Elementary in Houston ISD. The Montessori Magnet school's curriculum focuses on the environment and science.

Photo courtesy of Tom Callins Photography.

holding books over their heads. The sculpture supports a sign displaying the name of the school and park in brightly colored tile mosaics.

Although every art project is different, each artist typically holds workshops where they work with the students on designing the art. Students benefit from this hands-on experience as they learn about different art mediums and the artistic process.

Some of the SPARK Parks also include an environmental component. Tinsley Elementary School, named for SPARK's founder, had a vision to develop a detention pond required for drainage control into a schoolyard nature center. The Tinsley Elementary SPARK Park and Nature Center now serves as a haven and sanctuary for native plants and birds, insects, butterflies, and turtles. The students, staff, and community now have a beautiful place to play, observe, and learn on land that once acted only as an open space for drainage.

One criteria for participating in the SPARK program requires that the park plans include pedestrian access for community use after school and on weekends. This allows all members of the community to enjoy the art and the recreational facilities of the park, giving them a central neighborhood location to gather with their

McWhirter Elementary in Clear Creek ISD received the first SPARK Park in the city of Webster, which was dedicated in November 2011. The school chose a space theme with red, white, and blue colors to reflect its mascot, an astronaut.

Photo courtesy of SPARK School Park Program.

families. A typical park consists of modular playground equipment, benches, picnic tables, a walking/jogging trail, trees, and outdoor classroom, as well as the public art component.

The successful SPARK Park model, unique to Houston in 1983, will be featured in an upcoming book telling the story of school playgrounds and how they have evolved in major cities. The organization has willingly shared this model with other school districts and would like to help the program expand into other communities. A SPARK Park was built at Banks Elementary in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 2002 in conjunction with Baton Rouge Parks and Recreation. SPARK is currently working on an agreement with San Antonio Sports to develop parks at schools in that

city. A long-term goal includes seeing SPARK grow or be replicated in other parts of the state and country.

So next time you are passing through Houston, take a detour with the kids to a SPARK Park. Besides providing a fun place for neighborhood families to gather, SPARK Parks increase the physical beauty of Houston and pay tribute to the rich cultural heritages that are found in the city.

Kathleen Ownby has been director of SPARK for twenty-five years. She is a graduate of Leadership Houston Class XI and was recently named one of Houston's 50 Most Influential Women by *Houston Woman's Magazine*. Kathleen's favorite activities involve her two grandchildren – Lucy, six, and Byron, three.



HISTORY AND THE OUTDOORS CONVERGE AT SAN JACINTO

The San Jacinto Battleground is best known as the site where a small volunteer army under General Sam Houston defeated the larger, better equipped Mexican Army under General Santa Anna to secure Texas's independence. Today, the initial parcel of land designated in 1907 for the first Texas State Park has grown to over 1,300 acres. The park habitats vary and include coastal tall-grass prairie, tidal marshlands, and lowland forests. This allows San Jacinto to be a host to over 240 species of year-round and migratory birds and other wildlife including coyotes, armadillos, alligators, and river otters.

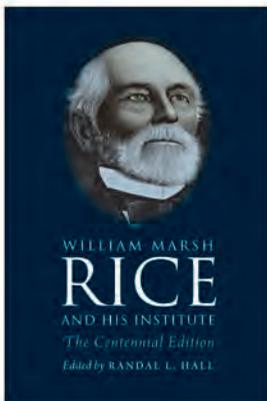
Visitors looking to enjoy the historical aspects of the site can visit the San Jacinto Monument and take the elevator to the observation deck 489 feet above ground, explore Battleship *Texas*, a veteran warship from both world wars, or walk around the battlefield to visit the markers commemorating the battle. For fans of outdoor recreation, trails are open year-round, currents in the marsh allow for peaceful kayaking, and green space abounds to spread out, have a bar-b-que, or play sports.

The San Jacinto Battleground opens 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily, closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. Fees may apply for the Battleship *Texas* and certain activities within the San Jacinto Monument. For information, call 281-479-2431 or visit www.texasstateparks.org.



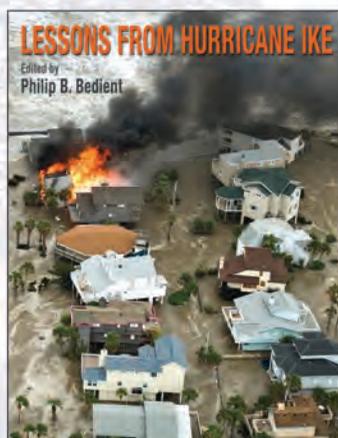
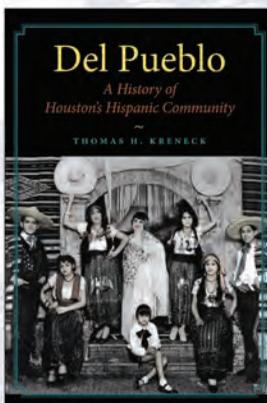
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Emancipation is a Park

By Carroll Parrott Blue



Jack Yates, far left, and other members of the African American community celebrate Juneteenth, circa 1880.

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

During the summer between second and third grade, I fell hopelessly in love with cotton candy. That delicacy excelled as the most perfect experience in my then eight-year-old world. Watching it being made, then touching and finally tasting it was mesmerizing. The notion that a machine could spew out pink strands of sugar fascinated me. I recall the stickiness between my fingers as I snatched at bits of fluff from the huge ball of its sweetness. I remember these pink fluffs turning into red shards that I eagerly stuffed in my mouth.

I was at a carnival on a hot summer night in Houston's Emancipation Park when I met cotton candy. Because I loved everything about that first bite's memory, I also fell in love with hot summer nights, the carnival, and the park.

Cotton candy was a ruse that summoned me in search of its sweetness to also partake of the park's other delights. I learned how to swim in the giant pool, to eat hot spicy barbecue and ice-cold watermelon at church picnics, to bring pastel colored wrapped gifts to my friends' birthday parties, and to proudly pass the park on my way to St. John's Baptist Church on Dowling Street in Easter outfits that signaled

my growth from flat-chested kiddy tops to bras underneath sleek junior miss dresses.

As life diverted my attention elsewhere, I forgot about the park. When I returned sixty years later in 2009 for the park's 135th birthday, I was open to learning what it had taken to allow a little eight-year-old Black girl to love her first bite of cotton candy. The answer, I discovered, was inside the far-sighted and determined intent of four former slaves. In the nineteenth century, the four exhorted a community to sacrifice a collectively hard-earned \$1,000 to buy ten acres of land so that all of Black Houston could celebrate into perpetuity the Emancipation Proclamation on June 19, or Juneteenth, in honor of that fateful day in 1865 when Texas slaves finally learned that they were free.

Emancipation Park, as it has been named since 1872, is located in Houston's Third Ward and is bounded by Dowling, Elgin, Hutchins, and Tuam Streets. At first it was an empty lot that was closed, fenced off and used for one purpose: to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation on Juneteenth. The original founders did not have enough money to keep the park open the rest of the year after the



Emancipation Park mural of African American leaders, 1975.

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

annual celebration. Yet because of their initial effort, from 1872 on there were the festive Juneteenth celebrations with music, dancing, food, and inspirational speeches that over time have created a legacy for African Americans.

One document that the park leaders created with the City of Houston stated that for as long as Houston existed, the park was to be dedicated to its African American citizens. Past agreements written, signed, and archived do last. I discovered that in spite of how we were doing it, we, the living, were continuing to expand on the legacy of the former slaves' vision.

While the United States of America's Emancipation Proclamation dates slavery's end as starting on January 1, 1863, African Americans in Texas were not yet aware of the proclamation. On June 18, 1865, Union General Gordon Granger, the commander of U.S. troops in Texas, arrived in

Galveston with 2,000 federal troops in tow to take possession of the state and enforce the emancipation of its slaves. On June 19, 1865, he read General Order 3, making freedom a reality for 250,000 Texas slaves.

To celebrate their freedom, newly-freed Texas slaves decided to memorialize this day, and the following year, Juneteenth celebrations began across the state. In many places, they pooled their funds specifically for their communities' increasingly large Juneteenth gatherings.

An African American tradition since that time, Juneteenth is now the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. While these festivities have followed an ebb and flow in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Houston's Emancipation Park remains the first public land purchased in Texas in 1872 by former slaves specifically for Juneteenth events.



Children play at Emancipation Park in the 1970s.

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



A couple relaxing at the park.

Photo by Ray Carrington.



Photo by Ray Carrington.

Other documented land purchases include Mexia, Texas's Booker T. Washington Emancipation Proclamation Park being purchased in 1898, followed in 1909 by the purchase of Austin, Texas's Emancipation Park. There is one other Emancipation Park in the world, and it is in Kingston, Jamaica. That park's name is also centered on that country's history of slavery.

The state of Texas named Juneteenth an official state holiday in 1980, and as of March 2010, thirty-six states and the District of Columbia have recognized Juneteenth as either a state holiday or state holiday observance.

On one bleak and bone-chilly winter day in 2006, Bill Milligan and I ambled through what seemed to be, to most people, an abandoned park. Bill is semiretired, like myself. In addition to writing poetry and taking photographs, he is a staunch community member who, as a child, was nurtured by the park's activities, namely swimming, baseball, square dancing, and outdoor movies.

We both are from this neighborhood and had visited this park many times as children. Although we did not know each other then, we held fond memories of this park as a vibrant, child-friendly, living place. But on this particular day, without a word between us, we both knew that the park that we had known in the past was dying.

That day the sky's gray blanket of clouds covered everything. Bill was looking straight away at this gleaming new downtown Houston. He heaved his shoulders and sighed. Heavy was so full of everywhere that I could not stand the hopelessness in our silence.

"Hey Bill," I blurted out in the heat of discovery, "No one wants this place. This is neutral territory. We can build here."

We were standing in this park over fifty years after the civil rights movement, and we were looking at the downside of this movement's triumph. According to Dr. Mindy Fullilove in *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, a groundbreaking book on the impact of urban displacement and gentrification on African American communities, since 1949 over 2,500 communities had experienced the U.S. government's urban renewal plans. Over 1,600 of these com-

munities were African American. The ensuing gentrification and displacement done in the name of progress had left our community in shambles.

Over the years, our Third Ward community had turned into a war zone for politicians, ministers, business people, and just plain old power-hungry folk who claim this and that location or organization as their very own private turf. Poverty showed up as decay, empty lots, and unemployed broken spirits that overtook everything. We were losing Third Ward to developers, transportation czars, city planners, and well-heeled middle-class young people who, even when Black, did not look or act like us. Our enemies were those who wanted to and could choose to live here in expensive new townhouses, close to downtown because they had either the money or the credit scores to buy the land. Most of us who had remained were renters, retired, on disability, or jobless and therefore ripe for displacement.

That very afternoon we dusted ourselves off by re-starting the Friends of Emancipation Park. We invited people who we knew cared to join us. Regular monthly meetings followed.

Bill's deep sense of giving back to our community motivated him. What propelled me was my childhood memories of what was now lost and what could be recovered, when people cared. These memories washed over me. Every year the carnival would come to town. One year, the merry-go-round that I insisted on riding made my father throw up. An empty lot right across Dowling had once been the home of Rettig's Ice Cream Parlor where I ate my first banana split. It was so nasty that from that day to this I have never had the stomach to try another. The Park Theatre was once catty-corner to the park. It was here that I watched Ava Gardner transform herself into *The Barefoot Contessa*. Her bad-girl-gone-wild role ignited a sense of the free spirit inside me, even though the film, in the end, punished her for her transgressions. And then there was that day in 1970 when I forced my father, as he drove us down Dowling Street, to turn his head to actually see the rifles sternly and proudly held by the Black Panthers in front of their office located on the corner across from the park. At home he had insisted that there were no guns. "Those boys bluffing," he told me.

I dared him to drive back by to see for himself. He did, taking me with him. As he drove nearer to the site, I regretted my dare when I saw his hands trembling on the steering wheel. My father was born in 1899. As I watched the fear grow in my father's old eyes, I saw him turn and look straight into the fearless eyes of those armed young men. Shortly after that day, on July 26, 1970, Houston police gunned them down.

Houston, Texas, cannot abide Negro men with guns.

The last time this city experienced this phenomena was on August 23, 1917. It was at the start of World War I, and Black soldiers were sent in to guard Camp Logan as it was being built to house a military training camp. On that summer night over 140 Black soldiers who were tired of whites harassing them, targeted and killed close to twenty white policemen and other white men who had been making their lives hell.

Almost one hundred years ago, city fathers decided that Houston would never again have a military base. This decision grew out of their fear of Negro men with guns. People say that integration and the building of two freeways crisscrossing Third Ward was the start of my community's demise. I, on the other hand, mark the fifty year space between the 1917 Camp Logan incident and the 1970 police murder of Black Panther Carl Hampton, the group's leader. Carl Hampton was not related to Chicago's Fred Hampton. The 1917 and 1970 events encase us in this winter in America that brought about Emancipation Park's hibernation — the long sleep that Bill and I witnessed during our afternoon journey in the park.

Houston is so flat that you can see for miles around. I remembered the park in the past as being surrounded by a great horizon of trees and sky in the distance. Today the city's skyscrapers have grown so tall that they loom over the park. Houston is no longer a backwater town. Houston is now the energy capital of the world. A strange quality of change does exist here, even as Dixie's overlay remains.

By 2010, Houston's Emancipation Park had been awarded a historic designation from the city and money for the park's revitalization followed. Emancipation Park is now slated to become an international destination. With \$6 million seed funding, Philip Freelon, an internationally recognized architect with a solid design and engineering team behind him, is designing a plan that the City of Houston is using to raise the funds to renovate the park.

In the fall of 2010, the Freelon Group took a group of

In 2007, the late Thelma Scott Bryant, who was over 100 years old at the time, showed off her scrapbook. Her handwriting describes posing by a tree with her "Beau" in Emancipation Park when she was in the ninth grade.

Photos courtesy of Johnny Hanson.



us – Emancipation Park friends and stakeholders – to visit New York City and Chicago to see other neighborhood parks to inspire us and our design team as we work together to create the park's new identity.

This African American community pocket park in Houston is the city's oldest park, the first park in the state of Texas celebrating Juneteenth. In the 1860s, most white Americans thought of slaves as nothing more than work horses, mules, and dogs. Blaming the victim, most whites thought of slaves as dirty, smelly, childlike, and ignorant chattel, as something less than human. Yet our country's economic greatness has been and continues to be gained on the backs of those whose free or cheap labor has fattened our wealth. For some reason we tend to distance ourselves from this fact. We turn the people who provide our country's almost free, and in some cases, slave labor into animals or criminals rather than acknowledge the enormous value that this cheap and mostly free labor brings us.

What an irony, then, that the ten acres of land purchased here in Houston by former slaves to celebrate their freedom would become the first park in Texas designated for Juneteenth celebrations. And that this park has now become known as the oldest park in our city. And that Juneteenth, the designation for June 19, 1865, celebrates the real end of slavery across the United States of America.

In the twentieth century I played in Emancipation Park unaware that it was created by former slaves for future generations of children like me or that in the twenty-first century Black children would continue to play there amongst their families, some of whom were now homeless, prostitutes, pimps, and drug dealers. Resolute in 1872 to make things better, those newly freed ancestors had willed their reach into an unknowable future to provide me with a safe place so liberated in spirit that I could invent – without any limitations – my eight-year-old sense of fun.

Carroll Parrott Blue is a research professor at the University of Houston Center for Public History and is the NEA Our Town Southeast Houston Initiative project investigator as well as executive director of The Dawn Project, one of the collaborating organizations in the NEA-Funded Initiative. She is an award-winning filmmaker, author, and interactive multimedia producer.

The Next Phase for Emancipation Park

By Naveen Inampudi

Current proposals to renovate Emancipation Park will focus on both restoration and expansion, from refurbishing the existing community center and pool to creating new water features and trails to enhance the experience of park guests. Reflecting the desires expressed by the community, the overall development project, estimated at \$33.6 million, has three central objectives: to create a beautiful and functional park space for the residents of Third Ward, to spark redevelopment of the neighborhood, and to make the park a destination point for national and international visitors.¹ Given Emancipation Park's historical significance, Michael Mauer of M2L Associates, the local landscape architect for the Emancipation Park upgrade, stressed that the Freelon Group, which is handling the improvements, recognizes that adding to the park while maintaining some of the park's original form and amenities are paramount to reviving the park and honoring its legacy.²

Over time, the park has evolved to meet many different needs, and the Freelon Group has proposed a number of additions to reestablish the park as a cornerstone of Third Ward. A redesigned recreation center with multipurpose functionality will be the focal point of the park to draw in the neighborhood children and create an atmosphere that engenders daily use of the facilities by young and old alike. The recreation center will boast a bevy of features including a high-school-size gym, fitness center, locker rooms, and classroom space. Mauer notes that the design of the recreation center encourages its use as a meeting point. Other additions to the park include a patio in the northwest corner with rocking chairs where adults can sit and watch their children on the playground and an expanded picnic area in the southwest corner to add to the neighborhood

feel. Throughout the park, plaques will be added that commemorate Emancipation Park's history, telling the story of its founders and heritage.³

The Freelon Group and M2L Associates aim to create a sustainable park that keeps maintenance costs and energy usage to a minimum, including the addition of solar power components. The architects have designed the community center to maximize efficiency by taking advantage of natural lighting during the day and using the lights only when necessary at night. They hope to take advantage of nature by reusing rainwater collected in retention ponds and tanks to water the plants and grass, keeping water bills to a minimum.⁴

The design team, managed by ESPA Corp, plans to improve the park's functionality so that residents can use the open areas and new buildings for community events and future Juneteenth celebrations. The designers hope to continue the spirit of by-gone traditions like cotton candy and Johnny Nash concerts while appealing to a whole new generation of park patrons. They want Emancipation Park to remain a center for mobilization and activism, with rallies such as the one held there recently to demonstrate support for Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager who was walking home from a convenience store when a neighborhood watch captain in Sanford, Florida, confronted and killed him following a struggle.⁵

Reverend Jack Yates and his congregation started off with a ten-acre lot in 1872, and since then, Emancipation Park has remained important to area residents, even when it showed its years. After the renovation project is completed, historic Emancipation Park will once again be a jewel of Third Ward.

Emancipation Park bird's-eye-view artist rendering.

Image courtesy of OST/Alameda Corridors Redevelopment Authority.



Moody Park: From the Riots to the Future for the Northside Community

By Robinson Block

Moody Park stands four miles north of downtown in the heart of what Houstonians now call the Near Northside, an area that grew up in the 1890s, largely around the Southern Pacific rail yards. Development of the Irvington Addition, where Moody Park is located, started in the 1920s and continued into the 1930s. European immigrants, including Italians, Germans, Poles, and Czechs, called the Irvington Addition home.¹ The western edge of the thirty-five-acre park is bounded by Little White Oak Bayou. Fulton Street is to the east, the middle-class Silverdale community is to the north, and the Irvington Village Public Housing Project is to the south.

According to the Houston Parks Department, “The City of Houston purchased all or parts of approximately 120 lots of it in 1923 for \$18,000 in order to build a public park. Another 6 lots were purchased that year from the estate of the Cetti family for \$8,000, and Moody Park was born.”²

The park, named for Alvin S. Moody, a Democratic politician of the era, was founded in 1925.³ The city added the park’s amenities incrementally as funding allowed. A *Houston Chronicle* report indicated that “[in] about 1939, the current small gymnasium and meeting rooms were built in the northeast corner; the pool was installed about 1953; the popular baseball diamonds have been added since the ‘40s through last year [1977].”⁴

In the 1950s, many new immigrants to the Moody Park area were Mexican and Mexican American. At the time of the 1970 census, the area’s inhabitants were “approximately fifty percent (50%) Mexican American, thirty-five percent (35%) White, and fifteen percent Black (15%).”⁵

Many people who lived in Houston in the 1970s hear “Moody Park” and immediately think of the Moody Park Riots, which took place on May 7, 1978. The riots resulted in forty arrests, more than a dozen individuals hospitalized, and hundreds of

thousands of dollars of property damage to neighborhood businesses and police department vehicles.⁶ Strained police community relations, particularly in the Mexican American community following the police killing of Jose Campos Torres, motivated the riots. The aftermath carried significant implications for race relations in Houston and accelerated political reforms in the city and police department. The event continues to impact the Northside and Moody Park today.

The Moody Park Riots had deep roots in Chicano political activism of the late 1960s and 1970s in Houston. The Mexican American Youth Organization’s (MAYO) Barrio Chapter, based largely in the Near Northside, began pushing for social justice and civil rights in their community. In 1970, MAYO youth took over the Juan Marcos Presbyterian Church, located at 3600 Fulton, across the street from Moody Park, in order to turn it into a community center that served

free breakfasts and provided educational programs for children and adults.⁷ Moody Park hosted community meetings to protest a flawed Houston Independent School District (HISD) integration plan and became home to *Huelga* (strike) Schools that taught the history of Mexican Americans and challenged HISD policies. Other *Huelga* Schools formed in the Northside, including one at Holy Name Church.

The riot reflected the larger Chicano movement, as well as other social movements of the era, that demanded social justice and an end to discriminatory policies against Mexican Americans and other minority groups. The Houston Police Department, infamous for its brutal treatment of minorities and young people, drew particular animosity, especially in response to the notorious events surrounding the death of Jose Campos Torres while in police custody. On May 5, 1977, Houston police officers took Torres, a Chicano Vietnam veteran from Houston’s East End,



The mural “Uplift our Culture” was commissioned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and created by the Museum of Cultural Arts Houston and thirty-five children, teenagers, and adults during the summer of 1998. It is still featured on the exterior of the Moody Park Community Center.

Photo courtesy of Avenue CDC / GO Neighborhoods.



Children dance at a celebration in Moody Park in 1973.

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

into custody at a bar. The officers severely beat him before taking him to jail, but the jail refused to accept him until he received medical treatment for his injuries. Instead of taking him to a hospital, the officers took Torres to 1200 Commerce Street where they beat him again before throwing him into Buffalo Bayou. Torres's body was discovered on May 8 near the McKee Street Bridge.

Prosecutors charged two of the officers with murder and three others with misdemeanors. Claiming that their clients could not get a fair trial in Harris County, defense attorneys successfully moved for a change of venue, and the case was tried in Huntsville, Texas. After month-long proceedings, the jurors found the officers guilty of negligent homicide, a misdemeanor with a sentence of probation and a one-dollar fine. Most observers agree that the case sparked the riots in Moody Park.⁸ Looking back, former police chief Harry Caldwell remarked, "It was the greatest miscarriage of public trust by police officers in my 27 years of wearing a badge."⁹

Accounts differ about exactly how the riot began. May 7, 1978, marked the park's Cinco de Mayo celebration, and throughout the day, thousands of people assembled. In the early evening, according to most reports, a fight resulted in a call for police assistance. When the police entered the park, people attending the celebration attacked them. The people threw bottles and eventually overturned patrol cars. The disturbance subsequently engulfed Fulton Street, where rioters broke windows of businesses, looted merchandise, and set some buildings on fire.

The police arrested forty people during the riot, including three people that they attempted to present as ringleaders. Travis Morales, Mara Youngdahl, and Thomas Hirschi were members of an organization called People United to Fight

Police Brutality that was active in the Chicano community following the murder of Jose Campos Torres. The police painted a picture of the "Moody Park 3" as instigators of the riot, chanting "Kill the pigs" and "Burn it down."¹⁰ Their defense attorneys produced eye witness testimony stating that although the three had been at the park earlier in the day, when the riot started, they were elsewhere at a barbecue.

Support for the defendants included representatives of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), a nationwide Maoist group that worked on behalf of its members, some of whom came from California to protest on the defendants' behalf. Other defendants received aid from an alliance of community groups like the Barrios Unidos en Defensa (United Neighborhoods in Defense), which contacted defendants, helped find them lawyers, and raised funds by selling tamales and taking on other tasks.¹¹

Although the district attorney ultimately dropped the charges against many of those arrested, he prosecuted some



The People United Against Police Brutality demonstrated at the park in 1978.

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



Youth from the Northside get backpacks with school supplies at the 2011 Back to School Health Fair at Moody Park, hosted annually by State Representative Jessica Farrar.

Photo courtesy of State Representative Jessica Farrar's office.

defendants aggressively. One of those charged, Amparo Rodriguez, had recently been released from a mental hospital and pleaded insanity at her trial. The judge in her case admonished the district attorney saying that he was prosecuting her “as if she had murdered the president.”¹² Ishmael Iturralde, charged with a felony for stabbing a news reporter, had his charges reduced to a misdemeanor when it became clear during his trial that the police arrested him before the stabbing took place.¹³ Two of the Moody Park 3 were charged with instigating a riot, but sentenced to only a fine and probation. One of the jurors in the case described the testimony of the government witnesses bluntly, “some just told blatant lies.”¹⁴ The criminal prosecutions of those involved in the Moody Park Riot concluded in 1980, but the impact of the riot on the police and the park have endured.

Following the riots, the park continued to be a center for flash points in the community. In 1979, some Hispanic residents of the area sought to change the name of Moody Park to Marcario Garcia Park. Garcia, a Mexican immigrant to Fort Bend County, served in World War II and received the Medal of Honor for bravery in combat in Germany. After returning to Texas, he again made headlines when the police arrested him for fighting with a restaurant owner who refused him service based on his ethnicity. At the Houston City Council meeting on August 15, 1979, Rogelio Hernandez read a statement in Spanish requesting the name change of the park. Numerous Northsiders with European surnames objected to the proposal,

Programs at Moody Park in 1976 included magicians and clowns to entertain the children.

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



including A. E. Johnson of the North Side Civic Club who presented a petition from people who opposed any name change.¹⁵ The name change did not take place, possibly in part because the Garcia family believed that the move was designed “to cover up memories” of the 1978 riot.¹⁶

The Moody Park Riot caused a great deal of suffering in the Northside, but it also acted as a catalyst for significant structural change in the Houston Police Department and its relationship with communities of color. Police Chief Byron Bond resigned in June 1977, a month after the death of Jose Campos Torres, and the new chief, Harry Caldwell, made a number of reforms. The Houston Police Department established a permanent Internal Affairs Division and a Spanish language program for officers. It set up police store fronts in minority neighborhoods and became the first in the country to launch a recruiting team composed of black and brown officers. The number of Hispanic officers in HPD grew from 164 on March 31, 1978, to 472 officers in April 1988.¹⁷

News stories published after the riot examined the conditions in the Northside and Moody Park and found insufficient amenities for a community with a great deal of need. A *Houston Chronicle* report a week after the riot described the park as having only, “One drinking fountain and one small circular toilet compound in this central section [to] serve the entire park . . . Near the old gymnasium, two cement shuffleboards appear impossible to play — strips of grass break through the surface . . . The Main baseball diamond overlaps with a soccer field that has one sideline running roughly through first and third bases.” The same report observed the park’s extreme popularity, “Residents of the park area say Fulton regularly becomes so congested on Sundays, that city buses have to detour through back streets to avoid being bogged down.”¹⁸

Moody Park became the location of the *Vaquero* statue, created by renowned native-Texan, Chicano artist Jose Luis Jimenez. The city and the National Endowment for the Arts purchased it for \$34,000 in 1978 and installed it in Moody Park in 1982.¹⁹ While many regard *Vaquero* as the most important piece of public art in Houston, its reception by some community leaders was far less positive. Even though a replica of the statue was installed in front of the Smithsonian



Free Zumba classes take place at Moody Park every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Attendance generally tops 100 people.
Photo by Rob Block.

American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., in 1990, two years later, the civic clubs of North Central, Lindale Park, Silverdale, and B.O.N.D came together to request that the sculpture be removed from the park. Leaders of these civic groups contended that the statue, which depicts a Mexican cowboy riding a horse and holding a pistol, sent the wrong message about violence and crime, and they sought its removal. Jimenez came to Houston in 1993 and argued that *Vaquero* represents a proud heritage of Mexican Americans who made up a third of all cowboys. The statue still remains in the park despite some opposition.

In 1986, the city rebuilt Moody Park's 12,400 square foot community center designed by architect W. Jackson Wisdom. Park bond funds and a community development block grant paid \$1,055,100 for its construction.²⁰ In 1988, Ben Reyes, city council member at the time, described the situation: "Moody has never been the same since. We spent a lot of money on it, fixing it up, making it beautiful, but the people still have a fear about what happened there that night. It has a stigma attached to it, and it'll take a lot to set that aside."²¹

In 1994 under Mayor Bob Lanier's Parks to Standards program, Moody was again overhauled. Improvements included additions to the community center, the creation of a running trail, construction of a gazebo, and resurfacing ball fields, tennis courts, and parking lots.²² In 1997, a new pool named after Bob and Elyse Lanier opened there.

While working on this article, I met with Debra Grisby, the facilities manager of Moody Park since 2005. On a cloudy Friday afternoon, Grisby shared her views on the park's past, present, and future. The Houston Parks Department has employed Grisby, a Louisiana native, for fourteen years. She initially felt apprehensive when she took the position of facility manager; many parks department employees told her stories about the riots, the frequent staff turn-over, that the park had been on "America's Most Wanted," and that the predominately Mexican American community might receive her, an African American woman, poorly. Seven years later, she is still happily nurturing numerous programs at the Moody Park Community Center and has friendly relationships with the diverse population that uses the park.

Today, Moody Park is the site of a number of important civic and community events. For example, it serves as the early voting site for its surrounding neighborhood, the only

parks department facility to do so. Jessica Farrar, the area's state representative, hosts an annual back-to-school health fair and backpack give-away for hundreds of youth and parents each August. Farrar's office also sponsors a "Monster Mash" every Halloween, providing a safe environment for children to get candy and observe the holiday. Each year the North Central Civic Club hosts an Easter egg hunt for children at Moody. The park holds an annual "Trash Bash" cleanup of the Little White Oak Bayou, a regional event of the Houston Galveston Area Council hosted by the M. D. Anderson YMCA, which inherited it from the Silverdale Civic Club.²³

Moody Park also serves as a mecca for recreation opportunities and organized sports. With an indoor basketball court and two covered outdoor courts, the park attracts athletes from as far away as Greenspoint. It has frequently hosted amateur basketball events, like the Big Blacktop Battle 3 on 3 tournament, sponsored by the Houston Rockets. Baseball in the park has a long but fractured history. Lindale Little League, a private association founded in 1950, left Moody Park soon after the riots and moved its games to Robertson Park at Cavalcade and Robertson. In 2003, the Lindale leadership felt comfortable moving the games back to Moody Park.²⁴ Soccer now reigns supreme there, however, with both regular pickup games and a youth league organized with support from the Houston Dynamo available to park patrons.

The Community Center hosts a wide variety of activities: senior programs, martial arts classes, an after school program, and Zumba classes that regularly attract 100 people and meet on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. The Center's meeting rooms provide space to all kinds of groups, from civic clubs to organizers of high school reunions. In Grisby's seven years at Moody, attendance has slowly climbed for many of the programs and facilities in the park. But many who remember the area before the 1978 riots say that use of the park today pales in comparison to earlier times when it was packed every weekend with birthday parties, ball games, and barbeques.



Vaquero by Jose Luis Jimenez.
Photo courtesy of Houston Parks and Recreation Department.

Moody Park and the surrounding Northside community are currently undergoing a new series of transformations. Fulton Street, in front of the park, is under construction for the northern extensions of Houston's Red Line, which will connect the park and adjacent neighborhood to downtown, the Museum District, and the Medical Center. The construction process has been tedious with Fulton frequently closed to through traffic and construction vehicles taking up parking lots. However, the city's recent focus on the area has led to a plan to remodel and expand the park's community center under the direction of Houston-based Clark Condon Associates, which planned the 1994 remodel. It will close in September 2012 and reopen a year later. The plans expand the building, especially the popular weight room, and add amenities like an archery course, a first in the Houston Parks Department.

Grisby is taking everything in stride. Anticipating the disruptions that the park's remodeling inevitably will bring, she is working with the Wesley Community Center and neighborhood churches to make sure seniors have a place to continue socializing and assisting instructors to find new venues for their classes. Although these changes present inconveniences in the short term, the new light rail line to the area and community center will bring new positive attention to the Northside and to Moody Park.

Robinson Block has a B.A. in history and Mexican American studies from the University of Houston. He currently works as a community builder for Avenue Community Development Corporation in the Northside on a sustainable community development project called GO Neighborhoods.

Elizabeth Baldwin Park

Elizabeth Baldwin Park claims one of the most unique histories of any park in the city. The Houston Parks Department acquired the land in 1905 after receiving a bequest of \$9,250 from Baldwin's estate to establish the park. Baldwin was the daughter of Houston's first mayor and the second wife of William Marsh Rice, businessman and benefactor of Rice University. The Rices moved to New York City to escape tropical diseases found in Houston, but later returned hoping the warmer climate would help other health issues that Elizabeth experienced.

During this time, Elizabeth Baldwin had her attorney prepare a secret will that would give her half of her husband's estate based on Texas residency and community property. When she predeceased Rice in 1896, a legal battle ensued over whether the couple lived in Texas or New York to establish her entitlement to half of Rice's fortune.

The delay caused New York attorney Albert Patrick who represented Baldwin's residency claim to grow impatient. He arranged for Rice's valet to slowly poison Rice with mercury. After the 1900 storm hit Galveston and Rice was spending money to reestablish his businesses, Patrick feared his share of the wealth would be lost and ordered Rice's murder in September 1900. Patrick then tried to cash a forged check, and the whole scheme unraveled. He was sentenced to death, but the conviction was overturned despite testimony against him by the valet. In the end, Baldwin's estate received \$200,000, including the funds used for Baldwin Park, freeing money from Rice's estate to establish Rice Institute.

In 1912, Elizabeth Baldwin Park came full circle with the addition of a fountain named after her aunt, Charlotte Allen, a founding matriarch of Houston. The city upgraded it again through bond initiatives in 1930 and 1931, establishing a popular tennis

court. Most recently, a 2003 bond sale by the Midtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) brought many renovations to the park. The TIRZ added a Vietnamese Heritage Plaza, honoring the many Vietnamese residents in the area, that welcomes visitors in several languages. New trees were planted and an irrigation system installed to rejuvenate the green space. The park sports a crushed granite jogging trail, picnic tables, and chess tables for those that like to enjoy a breath of fresh air. A calm and serene park, Baldwin is located on Elgin near Highway 59.¹

The pieces scattered throughout this issue on neighborhood and special interest parks in Houston were prepared by *Houston History* intern **Naveen Inampudi**.



A ribbon cutting ceremony took place in the Vietnamese Heritage Plaza to mark the rededication of Baldwin Park on November 13, 2006.

Photo courtesy of Houston Parks and Recreation Department.

Memorial Park: Nature's 24 Hour Fitness

By Natalie Garza

Running the Seymour Lieberman Exercise Trail

The first time I ever ran more than half a mile was during my freshman year at Dartmouth College when it seemed that half the campus was trying out for crew. I never made the team, but one of the things I took away from those weeks of training was a love of running. During one work-out session, the coach told us to do several sets of push-ups and run a three mile trail. It sounded torturous that someone would voluntarily run that distance. Being from Texas, I was not prepared for the difficulty of running the hills of New Hampshire or the effect of the cool weather on my lungs, so I lagged behind during that first run and probably walked about half of it. For the remainder of my four years, I regularly ran that same route along Rip Road, leaving me with some of my best memories.

Since then my preference has been to run outdoor trails. Admittedly I am not the most dedicated runner, often going months at a time without putting on my running shoes; but when I moved to Houston, I quickly looked for trails to run. Something about going out on a run just made me feel settled in and connected to this place that was my new home. Houston is a great city for outdoor running with its many trails, and Memorial Park is easily the most popular place to run in Houston. The Seymour Lieberman Exercise Trail is just under three miles and named after a Houstonian who became one of the first regular runners at Memorial Park when the loop around the golf course consisted of nothing more than a grass path. In 1949, Lieberman founded the Junior Olympics, and in the 1950s and 1960s, he wrote articles and books promoting jogging and its health benefits. The park dedicated the trail to Lieberman in 1978, at the same time that the city replaced the worn out grass path with pine bark and mulch. In the 1980s, the trail received additional updates, including lights, a stretching area, water fountains, and a more durable crushed granite surface that dries quickly after a rain.¹

Enjoying a run on the Seymour Lieberman Exercise Trail. The many trees along the trail provide for a serene running environment but also serve as shade during Houston's hot summer days.

All photos courtesy of Houston Parks and Recreation Department.



With the Williams Tower as the backdrop, golfers have a beautiful view from a tee at the updated Memorial Park Golf Course.

In her brief history of Memorial Park, Sarah H. Emmott refers to the Seymour Lieberman trail as a place to see and be seen. On any given day, you can find running groups, parents with their jogging strollers, and hundreds of individual runners along the loop. What I like about the crowd running at Memorial Park is that they keep me motivated on days when it is difficult to place one foot in front of the other. Memorial Park is also a place that I enjoy sharing with others. During one of the first visits my parents and sister made to Houston, I convinced them to walk the Seymour Lieberman trail with me. When I got my first dog in Houston, I frequently took her on runs, and equipped with a jogging stroller, my three year-old son and I have shared many runs in the park. There are so many great things about the parks in Houston, which this issue of *Houston History* highlights. Memorial Park represents the variety of recreational activities enjoyed in the city's parks and some of the best amenities that our parks system offers.

History of the Park

Memorial Park sits on the former site of a World War I training camp called Camp Logan. During construction in 1917, the 3rd Battalion of the 24th U.S. Infantry, an all-black unit of soldiers from Illinois, was sent to guard the camp. On August 23, 1917, a group of these soldiers armed themselves and went out into the streets of Houston in response to the discriminatory treatment that they faced and the abuse of their fellow soldiers by police. Violence erupted with white citizens and black soldiers being killed. In the aftermath, the largest court martial in history took place, with over 110 indictments of black soldiers, nineteen were executed and sixty-three received life sentences in federal prison. No white officers or civilians faced punishment. Another regiment of black soldiers was brought in to replace the 3rd

Memorial Park by the Numbers⁸

- 10,000 runners use the Seymour Lieberman Exercise Trail daily.
- 65,000 rounds of golf are played annually.
- 42,000 tennis court reservations are made yearly.
- 20 miles of trails, 4 sand volleyball courts, 5 softball fields, 1 baseball field, 2 rugby/soccer fields, and 1 croquet court.
- 72nd largest city park in the U.S., beating Central Park in New York City.

battalion and they were allowed to move onto the camp grounds along with the 33rd division of white soldiers there for training. While stationed in Houston, the soldiers of the 33rd maintained a prominent presence in the community as Houstonians welcomed them into their homes and provided them with transportation. The division fought in France during the war where thousands were wounded or lost their lives. The camp closed in 1919, after the war, but the hospital remained open to treat wounded soldiers under the direction of the Public Health Service. In 1923, the hospital also closed, leaving the camp deserted.

The idea to turn the camp into a park was hatched in the pages of the *Houston Chronicle* during the summer the hospital closed. Columnist Ilona B. Benda wrote a tribute to the soldiers of Camp Logan that prompted Catherine Mary Emmott to write a letter to the newspaper suggesting that the city purchase a portion of the land and turn it into a park "in memory of the boys." The *Chronicle* published Emmott's letter, and her suggestion led to a meeting for the park.²



Memorial Park's Vale-Asche Foundation Playground is ninety percent accessible for children with mobility issues. It represents the first play area in Houston Parks and Recreation Department's Playgrounds Without Limits Campaign to create playgrounds that surpass ADA requirements and give children of all abilities the opportunity to join in the fun.

Memorial Park became a reality after the Hogg family bought some of the land and sold it to the city at cost with a stipulation in the deed that it serve as a park, otherwise ownership of the land would return to the Hogg family. The city took over 1,503 acres of land in 1924 and added another 8.84 acres in January 1942, from Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Wiess. At the time of its founding, some Houstonians thought Memorial Park was unnecessary because the city already had so much accessible land for public use.³ Now it is one of the most treasured parks in Houston. The Memorial Park Conservancy estimates that the park has four million visitors a year, including 10,000 runners daily. Other popular activities include baseball and softball with six fields available for public use, tennis with 42,000 tennis court reservations made annually, hiking and biking over the twenty miles of trails, weight training in the fitness center, swimming, volleyball, rugby, soccer, croquet, and children's playgrounds.⁴

The golf course and arboretum are two other popular destinations for recreation at Memorial Park. Previously a nine-hole course, the contemporary eighteen-hole golf course at Memorial Park opened in the summer of 1936. Golf course architect John Bredemus designed the course and called it, "my greatest golf course ever."⁵ It has a history of hosting various tournaments with professional and celebrity golfers. In the early 1990s, a campaign to restore the golf course arose after it had been neglected for several years, but controversy ensued over privatization. The course, which received an upgrade in 1994, remains under

the city's control. Patrons play an estimated 65,000 rounds of golf there every year.

Although it is a separate entity, the arboretum is a 155-acre "urban nature sanctuary" with five miles of trails located at the edge of Memorial Park. In addition to providing a retreat from the city, the arboretum has a twofold goal of preserving native plants and animals, as well as educating children about nature. Ecologist and educator Robert A. Vines introduced the idea to develop an arboretum in

The Seymour Lieberman Exercise Trail is friendly to canine exercise enthusiasts. Here a jogger takes a water break at one of the water fountains along the trail where there is a permanent water station for dogs as well as humans, and bags available to pick-up after your dog.





Evidence of the 2011 drought is quite drastic in Memorial Park where many trees lay fallen or visibly dried-up. The Memorial Park Conservancy is part of Re-Plant Houston, a multi-year reforestation campaign coordinated by the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. The campaign planted 25,000 trees throughout Houston. Here a group of new trees were planted opposite older trees in the park.

1950, but the money was not budgeted for the project until 1964. The arboretum has received many generous donations over the years to restore the grounds and develop a nature center building, discovery room exhibits, and most recently, a raised walkway for bird watching. Approximately 200,000 visitors enjoy the arboretum annually.⁶

Future of Memorial Park

As they look to the future, conservationists continue their vigilance of Memorial Park, ensuring that its evolution is respectful of the natural surroundings while catering to its multiple public uses. Together, the City of Houston, the Memorial Park Conservancy, and the Houston Parks Board Inc., developed a Master Plan project for Memorial Park under increasing pressure for new park facilities. For example, in 2009, workers completed construction of the Living Bridge over Memorial Drive connecting the north and south sides of Memorial Park. It enables pedestrians and cyclists to access both sides of the park without having to compete with traffic on Memorial Drive, while offering a visually pleasing natural environment.

The bridge represented just one part of a \$10 million dollar capital campaign spearheaded by the Memorial Park Conservancy to add multiple new amenities to the park.⁷

The campaign includes a now-completed tennis center plaza, a running trails center in the design phase to include locker rooms located south of the living bridge, and an outer trail on the opposite side of Memorial Loop East to serve as an alternative to the trail along Memorial Drive. Other aspects of the Master Plan project involve improving all of the trails, and a forestry plan currently focused on the clearing of dead brush as a result of the 2011 drought. The most urgent project scheduled for the fall of 2012 is the conservancy's planting of thousands of new seedlings.

Memorial Park remains one of the largest urban parks in the United States thanks to the foresight of those who proposed its establishment and fought for its preservation over the years. As a space for outdoor recreation, Memorial Park remains one of my favorite places to run and picnic, and more recently for playground visits. A couple of years ago, I started running longer distances in preparation for a half marathon, and I always figured out a route that would take me through a trail in Memorial Park. There's still something about those runs that makes me feel at home.

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Lynn Eusan Park

A quiet green space on the University of Houston campus, Lynn Eusan Park is tucked between the Cullen Performance Hall, Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, and Cougar Village. Previously called Peoples Park, it has hosted concerts, political rallies, poetry readings, pep rallies, barbecues, ballets, and fun runs. Many may remember the park as home to the UH cougar mascot, Shasta, who resided in a special “den” there from the 1960s to 1980s.

In 1976, the board of regents voted unanimously to rename the park for Lynn Eusan, who became UH’s first African American homecoming queen in 1968. Well-respected as a student and political activist, Eusan organized the Committee on Better Race Relations and was a founding member of the campus Afro-Americans for Black Liberation, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and Self-Help for African American People through Education. Hailed as a pacesetter and pioneer, Eusan died tragically in 1971 after being stabbed and sexually assaulted; her assailant went unpunished. Fittingly, the university has designated Lynn Eusan Park a place for “Freedom of Expression” where free inquiry and discussion are encouraged.

As part of the university’s public art program, the *Statue*



Lynn Eusan Park Stage rendering provided by Walter P. Moore and Brave/Architecture.

Image courtesy of University of Houston.

of *Four Lies* was installed on the park’s west side in 2010. Created by UH alums, Jack Massing and Michael Galbreth, the Art Guys, the work is a play on Harvard’s “Statue of Three Lies” and intended to beckon students to interact with the two bronze figures and question the placement of the work’s other elements. Lynn Eusan Park will get a new stage later this year featuring improved sight lines, lighting, and sound system to enhance its diverse programming. In between events, the park is a welcome outdoor respite.²

Lee and Joe Jamail Skate Park

The Lee and Joe Jamail Skate Park opened in June 2008, giving local skaters and skateboarders their own public space to do some kick flips, ollies, and grinds. In 2007, Houston attorney and philanthropist Joe Jamail Jr. donated \$1.5 million, which was coupled with other public and private funds. With Jamail’s assistance, the Public Use Skateparks of Houston (PUSH), a nonprofit organization, completed the park in honor of his wife, Lee Hage Jamail who passed away earlier in the year.

Built on land donated by the City of Houston near Memorial Drive and Sabine Street, the Lee and Joe Jamail Skate Park is a 30,000 square foot, state-of-the-art, in-ground facility capable of hosting local, national, and international skateboarding competi-

tions. Designed by Clark Condon & Associates of Houston and Grindline, the park reportedly boasts the world’s largest cradle. Grindline designer Micah Shapiro said that the park accommodates everyone from novices who are just learning to ride a skateboard to professionals looking to work on their skills. The park features rails throughout the interior, and two large domes for people who are more ambitious.

With the downtown skyline as its backdrop, this park blends urban and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Located near the intersection of the Allen Parkway and I-45 in Buffalo Bayou Park, the skate park is free of charge. Helmets are required.³



Photo courtesy of Houston Parks and Recreation Department.

SQUARE DANCE — HOUSTON STYLE

By Twyla Woody

"Swing your partner, do-si-do..."

Many people do not realize that a cultural phenomenon has revolved around square dancing in Houston for almost seventy years. Square dance is a specialized folk dance with four couples positioned in a square. Couples 1 and 3 are known as head couples, and couples 2 and 4 are known as side couples. A caller, who does not usually participate in the dance, cues the dancers to complete various movements or steps, which they have learned previously. The sequence of steps varies with the song or pattern being called. The music may be anything from pop to country to Broadway musical or even rock, adding to square dancing's broad appeal.¹

The beginning...

Square dance has its roots in European folk dance, with various circle dances done across the United States. Modern or Western square dancing did not become popular until the 1940s. In the early forties a few clubs around Houston held dances with about three squares or twenty-four dancers. When soldiers returned from World War II, reunited couples wanted to engage in social activities together, and interest in dancing began to mount. In 1947, Dr. Carl Journell, a dentist, started teaching square dancing in Houston and

had so many applicants that he had to limit the class size. One class had 140 couples.

At about the same time, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department began offering free square dancing classes in various city parks. After ten lessons, a class graduated and formed a square dance club. Clubs grew like wildfire, and many had waiting lists. After six months, new dancers were considered experts, and they spread the dancing fever to their friends.

Journell also conducted classes in Beaumont and in East Texas. Herb Greggerson, who some say actually taught Journell how to square dance, taught in San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and the Rio Grande Valley. As South Texans learned to square dance, the excitement grew, and dancers flocked to the area from all around to attend numerous square dance jamborees.

With several jamborees being held in Houston in 1947, it became apparent that organizing a common alliance would facilitate planning and coordination. The Square Dance Council of the Houston Area formed and entered into a partnership of convenience with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. The Council enjoyed the use of

Over 20,000 square dance enthusiasts attended the 35th National Square Dance Convention in 1987 at the Astrodome. Dancers marched in by state during the Parade of the States, and the Texas dancers formed their state's iconic shape. Afterwards, all the dancers spread out across the floor to form squares and dance.

All photos courtesy of Houston Square and Round Dance Council.





Caller Lew Torrance (at microphone and wearing glasses) served as president of the Houston Square Dance Council from 1962 to 1963. At that time, square dances predominately featured live music.

economically-priced park buildings for its dances, and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department enjoyed widespread community support for a popular recreational activity. As part of this agreement, a trust fund controlled by the Houston Parks and Recreation Department was established. All of the money paid by dancers for use of buildings, including for jamborees and festivals, went into the trust fund. Blanche Marrero, the trust fund officer, paid the bills using these monies. Blanche, a co-organizer of the Council, became the key connection between the two organizations, teaching classes for the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and acting as Council secretary. Also in 1947, Dr. Journell's teen exhibition group participated in Texas governor Beauford H. Jester's inaugural ball.

The Spring Festival . . .

The Square Dance Council and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department sponsored their first Spring Festival on April 8-9, 1949, at the Houston Coliseum. Funded by proceeds from previous jamborees, the event was free to all local and state club members. Dancers received tickets in advance through their clubs. Spectators paid twenty-five cents. All workers and callers donated their time and talents. Callers came from across Texas and as far away as California and Connecticut. At that time, the Coliseum remained open under the balcony, providing room for hundreds of dancers to dance there in addition to the space on the main floor. Organizers arranged for 100 "tourist court units" and 250 double rooms in hotels and motels at a cost of \$4 to \$6 per room. The list included the Warwick, Milby, Texas State, Plaza, Sam Houston, San Jacinto, Fannin, and Woodrow. After dividing the list, half of the hotels were recommended for travelers coming from east of Dallas and the other half for travelers coming from the west.

At that time, the Houston area had over sixty clubs

and about 5,000 members. A total of 9,950 dancers and spectators attended the first Houston Festival, which also included folk dancing since it was customary to alternate a square dance with a folk dance song. The Coliseum held 171 marked squares, and overflow squares danced wherever they could find a spot. One report estimated that dancers formed over 200 squares. At the time, participants typically paid fifty cents to a dollar to attend special dances. To keep dancers abreast of the square dance news, the organizations initiated a square dance newsletter for the Houston Council and surrounding area clubs.

In addition to the various jamborees, the Spring Festival became an annual event put on by the Square Dance Council of Houston and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. This tradition has continued every year since 1949. As part of each festival, exhibitions featured such specialties as Journell's dance team from the School of the Deaf, who performed in 1950; and the Wheel Blazers (wheel-chair dancers) from Waco, Texas, and the Skating Square from Galveston, which performed in 1954.

The Boom . . .

The level of interest continued to grow. By the late 1940s, Houston had over 100 clubs and hundreds of callers; and by 1952, the annual festival, known as the Square Dance Spring Festival, was regarded as the outstanding square dance talent roundup in the country. Award winning exhibitions and long, colorful, swirling western skirts became quite a draw for spectators and dancers. Nationally acclaimed callers included Rickie Holden, who trained the Radio City Rockettes, and Les Gotcher, the caller for the Hollywood movie set. Herb Greggarian's Bluebonnet exhibition had appeared on the Fred Waring television show. The ticket price had risen to \$1 for a dancer but remained twenty-five cents for a spectator. The event continued to be held at the Coliseum and to be co-sponsored by the Square Dance Council of Houston and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department.



The Spring Festival in 1949 had spaces marked for 171 squares on the Coliseum floor. The scene was described as looking "like hundreds of ants."



Dancers at the 1987-1988 Houston Hoedown.

Square dancing was in its boom. The Spring Festival's attendance reached approximately 25,000 in 1953. The following year, Mayor Roy Hofheinz encouraged participation in saying that square dancing promotes unity, develops group fellowship, creates wholesome activity, and "teaches grace, rhythm, and confidence."² Dances featured more than thirty different callers and round dance cuers. Two live orchestras often played for the event. A caller would call a tip, or two songs, then a round dance was cued, after which the orchestra rotated out and a new caller took the stage. Round dancing, in which individual couples dance in a large circle formation, did not require a specific number of couples, so extra couples could take part.

In 1954, a group of callers organized the Callers Association, which allowed callers to share ideas with one another. Some callers called full-time for a club while others called only occasionally. Some also taught square dance. Terms, definitions of calls, figures, and cues became standardized, and over a period of time, the "professional caller" emerged.

The square dance movement decreased in popularity somewhat, about this time, driving the existing square dance record companies out of business or forcing them to look for other sales revenues. This resulted in a lack of good square dance music until new record companies formed that catered to square dance's needs. Larger orchestras played for recordings, and pop music was often choreographed for square dance or round dance. This eventually led to the current practice of calling to recorded background music and the demise of the square dance orchestra.

The 1959 Festival witnessed remarkably heightened enthusiasm when Houston's ABC Channel 13 televised the Saturday night dance. Exhibition groups included The Rockettes and The Houston Polka Dots.

Visitation between clubs became a prime objective by 1962. For attending a dance at another club, members earned points for their club toward the "Steal a Banner" contest, which climaxed at the Spring Festival. On the festival's opening day, the *Houston Chronicle* billed it as "Texas's Biggest Festival" and dedicated the entire front page to square dance stories.

Highlights of the last fifty years . . .

Chairing the Festival became the Council president's responsibility, and presidents began designating a theme for the event. The Coliseum hosted the festivals for twenty-five years before it moved to new locations such as the Albert Thomas Convention Center, Fondren Recreation Center, Astrohalla, Astroarena, Pasadena Convention Center, Ft. Bend County Fairgrounds, and Galveston's Moody Gardens. The *Houston Chronicle's* art editor served as the pre-festival chairman in 1964, bringing increased media exposure to the dance. At the 1967 Festival, the music for callers and dancers switched from live bands to records. That same year saw the formation of the Camping Squares. The campers met at a campground for a relaxing weekend with square dances held in the evenings on-site. Houston hosted the Texas State Festival in June 1970 with dancers coming from across Texas and the country.

Initially, round dancers, unlike square dancers, did not have cued steps to follow. They memorized a routine for a song and then simply danced while the caller sang that tune. In the 1970s, round dance steps began to be taught, and callers started cuing rounds. A caller might do a cued number followed by an uncued one. After a few years, the steps became standardized with more consistency from one dance event to another. Dancers could dance to a new song by following the cued steps or movements. This led to the practice of having cuers who exclusively cued round dances. In 1974, the Houston Council changed its name to the Houston Square and Round Dance Council (HSRDC), incorporating both groups of dancers in one organization.

Other changes in 1975 included the introduction of clogging to Houston and the formation of a four-square adult exhibition group, The Spirits. Members came and went, but The Spirits danced standard and uniquely choreographed numbers at festivals for over thirty-five years. In 1976, HSRDC added a ball to honor club officers to its annual itinerary, and the group held its first woman-chaired meeting. The Spring Festival moved to the fall season and, in 1985, changed to its current name, the Houston Hoedown.

Houston hosted the 35th National Square Dance Convention in 1987 at the Astrodome complex, which included the Astrodome, Astroarena, and Astrohalla. The convention, chaired by Lee and Lettie Reed, was entitled "Promenade Eight in the Bluebonnet State." A total of 20,164 dancers came from across the United States and the world to dance at the convention. Forty-two different exhibition groups performed, and round dancing had become popular enough to merit a special dance area and times. Two fashion shows, one for teens and one for adults, showed off the latest apparel. One of the convention's biggest highlights, however, was a massive Parade of the States in the Astrodome with each state's song played as those dancers arrived. Dancers formed a silhouette of Texas on the dance floor.

Since the Houston Square and Round Dance Council includes folk dancing and clogging, in addition to square dance and round dance clubs, the 1996 Hoedown featured exhibitions by two clogging groups. The 1997 event also included contra dancing, which continues to be done using a live band and resembles the stroll in formation but with



The Houston Square and Round Dance Council in the 2011 Houston Hoedown Grand March wearing the "Council" dress designed by Twyla Woody, shown second from right. Her husband, Woody, far right, carries the HSRDC officers' banner.

more energy. At the forty-eighth annual Texas State Square & Round Dance Festival held at the Galveston Convention Center in the summer of 2010, the HSRDC coordinated the Pre-Festival activities and dance on Friday and was heavily involved in the whole festival. Activities included the Friday night dance itself, and the seashore after-party, where twenty-eight squares danced "under the stars" on the beach.

Plans are underway for the 2012 Hoedown, November 16 and 17, featuring Dee Dee Dougherty, national caller from Minnesota. Dee Dee started square dancing at the age of three and clogging in an exhibition team by age six. Attendees can expect some of her calls to include a bit of yodeling—another of her specialties. The event will be held at Moody Gardens.

Square dancing today

Almost all square dancing today is done to recordings. Wade Driver of Rhythm Records indicates that, surprisingly, about thirty percent of callers worldwide still use vinyl records; the majority, however, use digital recordings.³ "God Bless America" ranks first as the square dance recording with the most all time sales. Square dancing enjoys popularity in many countries around the world—but it is always called in English.

Several variations to the four-couple square format can be found, with "Progressive Squares" topping the list. In this stylization, dancers move around the dance floor by completing movements with specific nearby couples per the caller's direction. After traveling around the dance floor, the original squares "magically" reform at the end with the same couples in their original positions.

Most of today's dances arrange the dance numbers into "tips" composed of two numbers followed by a break. With

basically two types of numbers, patterns (now commonly called patters) and singing calls, the first number in a tip is frequently a patter. The caller directs the dancers to execute certain moves; and although music plays in the background, the sequence of moves does not follow the music. The singing call, used routinely for the second number, is a series of steps choreographed to a specific song. Callers sing certain parts of the song, and for other sections of the melody, they sing words that correspond to the step

directions. Breaks between tips range from three or four minutes to as long as ten minutes. Sometimes during the longer breaks, either round dancing or line dancing is cued.

Ladies' square dance skirts vary in length from a few inches above the knees to ankle length. Numerous styles and unlimited color combinations can be seen, but the majority of women continue to wear full skirts. Some dancers wear pants or other street apparel, choosing not to have a square dance wardrobe.

Houston square dancers have received invitations to do exhibitions at all types of events and locations, including grand openings; other festivals; senior citizen, assisted living, and Alzheimer's facilities; schools; birthday and anniversary parties; weddings and even funerals. Most clubs have theme dances such as sock hops, Veteran's Day dances, luaus, ice cream socials, chili suppers, and Halloween dances. Most of these events include special food. Square dancing always has been, and continues to be, one of the most economical forms of recreation around. Today's dance charges in Houston average about \$6 to \$7, unless a meal is included, which raises the price to about \$15. Most square dancers will tell you that the number one thing they like about square dancing is the vast number of friendships they make, and that the only way to learn how much fun it is, is to get involved in it.

For more information on HSRDC, a club near you, lessons, and more, visit www.squarethru.com or email info@squarethru.com.

Twyla Woody and her husband, Charles (or "Woody" as he is known), are currently in their second year as HSRDC presidents. They have been active members of the Bluebonnets and the Tomball Promenaders square dance clubs for six years. Twyla has a M.Ed. with Special Education emphasis from the University of Houston and has worked in education for thirty-five years. She is an educational diagnostician for Cypress Fairbanks ISD.

PRESERVATION

THE RIVER OAKS THEATER: SAVED FROM THE WRECKING BALL?



The stunning auditorium of the River Oaks Theater features “Land” and “Sea” reliefs flanking the screen. The “Sea” detail is shown at left.

Photo courtesy of Preservation Houston.

By Ramona L. Hopkins

For over seventy years the River Oaks Theater has operated at 2009 West Gray in Houston’s affluent River Oaks community. Although the theater has changed over the years, it remains an integral part of Houston, the city’s culture and history, and of the movie industry in the second half of the twentieth century. The River Oaks Theater was the tenth Interstate Theater to open in a seven-year period and one of the last Art Deco buildings constructed in the city. Other historic theaters have been closed and demolished. Like them, the River Oaks Theater has also found its existence threatened.

Ever since a group of women fought to save President George Washington’s home in the mid-nineteenth century, groups have fought to preserve homes, churches, parks, and commercial buildings. In the 1960s and 1970s, organizations formed to protect the old movie theaters that were a central feature of most cities and towns. Communications professor Janna Jones argues, “Old movie theaters produce powerful feelings of nostalgia.”¹ The building itself, for many, serves as a real connection with the past. Everybody has memories of going to the theater with family and friends, the food they ate, the sights and sounds, and the film’s ability to transport them into another world. “To see a unit etched in our cultural memory reduced to rubble is a disturbing experience, one that severs tangible connections to our individual and collective heritage,” architect Joseph M. Valerio and Daniel Friedman explained.²



In July 2006, the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (now Preservation Houston) publicized news it received that property owner Weingarten Realty Investors planned on demolishing the Art-Deco-style River Oaks Community Shopping Center and the River Oaks Theater, which sat across the street from each other. With plans to build a Barnes and Noble Booksellers on the property, the existence of the nearby Alabama Theater, which housed a bookstore, was also in danger. Public outcry led to a movement to save all three properties. Despite the efforts of concerned Houstonians, part of the River Oaks Community Shopping Center was torn down in September 2007, and in 2008, construction began on a parking garage. Weingarten planned on tearing down the theater when its lease ended in 2010, but that never occurred. Instead, Houstonians have been left to wonder what the fate of their beloved theater will be. Should the River Oaks Theater be saved? People on both sides of the issue feel very strongly, and they seem to be unable to find common ground.

1900-1939

Following the devastating 1900 hurricane in Galveston and the discovery of oil at Spindletop, Houston grew rapidly as people moved here to find work in the refineries, oil fields, and factories. Estimates of the projected growth prompted Mike and Will Hogg and Hugh Potter to create a well-

Looking east toward downtown on West Gray, this 1940 aerial view of the River Oaks Shopping Center shows the gates to the River Oaks neighborhood across South Shepherd Drive in the foreground. The River Oaks Theater sits alone just above the shopping center. A section of the shopping center on the left was torn down in 2007 to make room for a Barnes and Noble and parking garage.

Photo courtesy of Preservation Houston.

planned, restricted community in River Oaks. In 1924, they bought over 200 acres of land west of Montrose Boulevard on the outskirts of Houston's city limits that was platted into individual lots and included a large golf course.³ They began buying land to the west, south, and east and formed the River Oaks Corporation.

The goal was to create a complete community that would sustain the needs of its residents. In addition to home sites, the plan included an elementary school, two shopping centers, and landscaped esplanades. The Hoggs and Potter hired Herbert Kipp, a civil engineer, to oversee the development and J. C. Nichols to create a shopping center similar to one he had worked on in the Country Club District of Kansas City that was the first of its kind. In 1937, the River Oaks Shopping Center opened on West Gray, "as a model of suburban convenience shopping that would enhance [River Oaks]."⁴ Nichols also acted as the landscape artist, and landscape architects Hare & Hare worked to protect the integrity of the area's environment. The corporation hired an official corporate architect, Charles W. Oliver, to insure that homeowners built beautiful homes appropriate for the neighborhood. To maintain River Oaks's exclusivity, the founders placed deed restrictions on the land and entered into a gentlemen's agreement to exclude Jews and African Americans.⁵ An escape from the city, the community offered all of the services families needed to live comfortably. Since movies had become an important part of Americans' lives, River Oaks needed to offer that service as well.

Movie palaces whose grandeur created a fantasy world for audiences began to appear across the country in the early 1900s. Houston opened its first movie palace, the Isis, in 1913. Designers gained inspiration from the Renaissance and employed Italian, Dutch, English, Gothic, Greek,



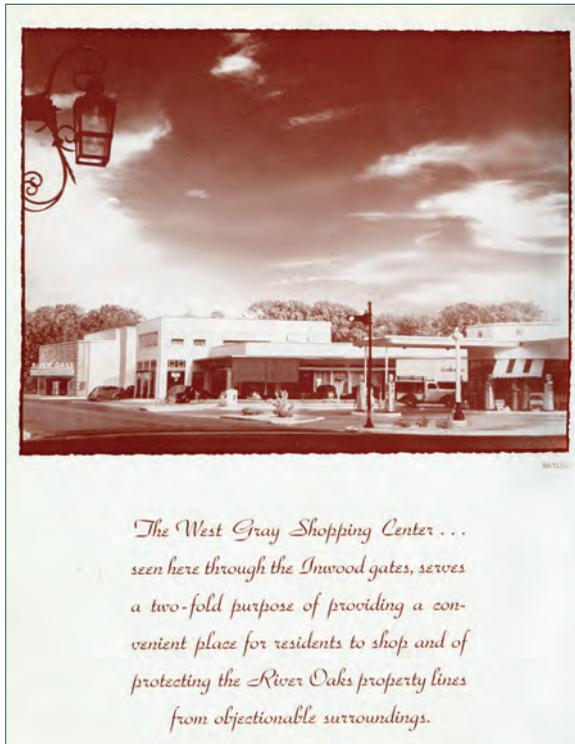
Jacobean, Roman Imperial, Lombardic, and Egyptian styles. A 1925 Paris exhibition introduced Art Deco's characteristic angular geometric form to the world and the influence quickly spread. "In nearly every country Art Deco was adopted as a way of embracing the modern and escaping restricting values," art curator Ghislaine Wood wrote.⁶

The movie industry took a strong hold in Houston, as each day between 8,000 and 10,000 people went to see movies. Throughout the economic boom of the 1920s, the movie palaces offered a glamorous form of entertainment. The economic effects of the Great Depression, however, resulted in a drop in movie attendance that by 1932 caused some movie studios to close and others to merge. Movies still offered people a way to escape their economic worries, but the drop in attendance brought an end to the era of large movie palaces.

When movie companies began building again, things had changed dramatically. Studios took advantage of newly developed technology and introduced movies with sound. "Talking movies were the novelty of the day. The public was swarming to theaters equipped with sound," Marguerite Johnson noted.⁷ Theaters had to provide a sound system and no longer needed the place for an orchestra or piano player. To save money, architects incorporated streamlined designs in the interior and exterior of the new neighborhood theaters. "New movie theaters were based on efficiency and scientific innovation and employed a pragmatic style rather than the ornamental and ostentatious designs of the movie palace," Janna Jones explained.⁸ As cities expanded, people did not want to travel downtown to see a movie when they could see one in their neighborhood.

NOVEMBER 28, 1939

In 1939, Interstate Theaters completed two new facilities in Houston. The first was the Alabama Theater, followed by the River Oaks Theater three weeks later. It opened on November 28, 1939, with the movie *Bachelor Mother*, starring David Niven and Ginger Rogers. Ads in the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Houston Post* welcomed the new theater and proclaimed its virtues as the city's "newest and safest neighborhood theatre," which appealed to the residents of a restricted-access community like River Oaks. To appeal to families, the local Monarch Cleaners offered all night services to those going to the theater. The Dallas firm of Pettigrew and Worley designed the building, and



The West Gray Shopping Center . . . seen here through the Inwood gates, serves a two-fold purpose of providing a convenient place for residents to shop and of protecting the River Oaks property lines from objectionable surroundings.

This ad, which appeared in the River Oaks Magazine in July 1939, spelled out the developers' intentions to protect the neighborhood. A similar ad for the theater itself described it as "Dedicated to discriminatory family taste and to the patronage of children. Designed especially for the community near which it was built."

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

Buck Wynn Jr. created its interior. His use of Art Deco statues and under-the-sea designs drew great praise. The interior featured "low relief goddesses – two stories tall, flank[ing] the movie screen." The *Texas Architect* added that "the broad sweep of plush seats recall a by-gone era of movie going elegance."⁹

On opening night, Mayor Oscar Holcombe attended, as did Hugh Potter, H. F. Pettigrew of Pettigrew and Worley, Buck Wynn Jr., and Paul Scott, the theater's manager and operator. The *Houston Post* reported that the theater could seat 1,000 patrons, and the wide spaces between the rows gave plenty of space for people to move about comfortably. The design took into account the theater's location in a grove of tall oak trees adjoining a residential neighborhood and was constructed with a low profile to conform to the proposed retail and office space in the adjoining River Oaks Shopping Center.¹⁰ Recently introduced at the New York and San Francisco Fairs, the latest technology, which featured a tube inserted into the aluminum handrail, lit the stairway to the balcony.

1940-PRESENT

Throughout the 1940s, the movie industry experienced another high point. Thousands returned to theaters to catch the latest news reel and watch a movie. By 1940, Interstate Theaters owned over 100 theaters in the state of Texas.

Suburbs began to grow as families moved out of the city centers during the 1950s. River Oaks and other suburbs provided white residents with a family-oriented neighborhood, and local businesses opened creating self-sufficient communities. Grocery stores, schools, and churches were joined by movie theaters, shops, and restaurants. Although the River Oaks Corporation dissolved in 1955, and the community opened to any who wished to live there, neighborhood associations still placed restrictions that made it hard for minorities to move into the area. Today, anyone who can afford it can move into River Oaks; however, it continues to be predominately white and has the highest socio-economic status of any Houston neighborhood.

Several changes also occurred in the 1950s that impacted the movie industry. The development of television had the most dramatic affect. Attendance at theaters began to drop as people stayed home to watch television with their families. Drive-in theaters also drew movie-going customers away from downtown and neighborhood theaters. The first one in Houston opened in June 1940 and was simply called the Drive-in Theatre.

Production studios developed new technologies like Cinemascope, Vista Vision, and Technoscope to produce better quality films, and this also had an effect on attendance. Failure to upgrade and accommodate the new technology ended in closure for many older theaters. By the 1970s, many of the downtown movie palaces had closed. With Houston's weak preservation ordinances, the historic theaters were quickly demolished. As the theaters closed, Houstonians lamented the destruction of the beautiful buildings and the material culture. In other cities, the reuse of movie palaces as museums, shops, or theaters prompted revitalizations of local downtown districts.

The River Oaks Theater survived the crisis and to remain competitive became a repertory theater that ran alternative films. In 1976, Landmark Theaters purchased the River Oaks Theater. The company, founded in 1974, became known for its historic theaters that featured classic, foreign, independent, and cult films.

By the 1980s, cable service, the VCR, and the corporate chain theaters took a toll on the older theaters. Repertory theaters were hit especially hard as many of the same features could be seen on cable or on videotape. To remain marketable, Landmark's theaters began to show independent and foreign language films, which proved successful.

The single-screen River Oaks Theater took a drastic step in 1987 when it removed the balcony and added two additional screens and an upstairs concession stand with a bar. In 1988, Heritage Entertainment, Inc., bought Landmark Theater Corporation, but the change did not affect the River Oaks Theater's daily operation or management. Today, it remains the only neighborhood theater built in Houston in the 1930s and 1940s still functioning as a working theater.¹¹

THE CRISIS

The River Oaks Theater has won many awards and remains one of Houston's beloved theaters. In 2000, Mayor Lee Brown declared March 26 River Oaks Theatre Day. One year later, the theater was given AWARD for the Preservation of a Landmark Facility as a Unique and Special Venue for Art, Vintage, and Independently Produced Films. *Inside Houston*, the *Houston Post*, and the *Houston Press* voted it the city's Best Movie Theater. In 2006, it ranked second on a list of 20 Cool Things about Houston, and Mayor Bill White again officially proclaimed a River Oaks Theatre Day. The *Houston Press* recognized the theater for the Best Film Series - Midnight Screenings in 2010. The River Oaks Theater hosts Academy Award parties, and plays cult classics, foreign, and independent films. It serves alcohol at its concession stand bar, offers alternative treats, and holds millions of memories.

Despite all of the theater's accolades, in 2006 news leaked that Weingarten Realty planned to raze the River Oaks



The theater as it appeared before construction of the adjacent shopping center in the 1940s. The developer advertised, "It sits, without electrical display or garish superstructure in a grove of tall oaks in perfect keeping with the neighborhood."

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

Shopping Center, causing a domino effect that also endangered the Alabama Theater. The news sparked a campaign to save the theaters and the center. The personal connection and memories of the River Oaks Theater, the historic design, and the one-of-a-kind experience, preservationists argued, far outweighed the desire for another chain store and cookie-cutter shop. Protest petitions had thousands of signatures within a week, prompting Weingarten to announce that if an alternative could be found to make the theater marketable, then the company would be willing to save it. This statement sums up how many people think about historic preservation: If a building is competitive and marketable, then it has value; otherwise, it is expendable. If well-established, maintained properties such as the shopping center, the River Oaks Theater, and the Alabama Theater do not bring in high profits, then they become worthless.

Customers found it difficult to park at the River Oaks Shopping Center and theater, and the busy street cutting through the center shopping area could be dangerous. The property owners believed a parking garage would create a large, safe area for people to park, making it easier to shop. With River Oaks's affluence (the area's median income in 2006 was \$185,674), property values continued to increase and the area attracted more business development.¹² Developing a new parking garage, a bigger shopping center to attract restaurants and spas, and a high rise to encourage more people to move to the area would result in even higher property values and revenues for the property owner. Weingarten saw this development as an improvement to the area, not a loss.

Weingarten's three-part plan for the new shopping center called for the demolition of the original River Oaks Community Shopping Center and construction of the garage and the new shopping area featuring Barnes and Noble. Next, the company planned to demolish the mirror shopping center across the street. The River Oaks Theater would be the last to fall. To retain the Art Deco design of



Today, the exterior of the River Oaks Theater and adjacent shopping center have a new look. The buildings have lost their characteristic Art Deco lines and color scheme to modernization.

Photo by Debbie Z. Harwell.

the new structures, Weingarten hired the internationally renowned architectural firm Altoon and Porter, which has won several awards for renovation and historic preservation and works to maintain the cultural integrity of the community in its projects.¹³

Citizens, Mayor Bill White, the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, and the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission worked to persuade Weingarten to change its plans. They offered Weingarten tax breaks as an incentive to put the property on the Historical Landmark list to save it. They gathered petitions and tried to negotiate a ninety-day waiting period. Due to Houston's weak preservation ordinances, however, it appeared that their efforts were in vain. With the destruction of the Shopping Center in September 2007, the focus shifted to saving the River Oaks and Alabama Theaters. In 2010, renovations occurred at the River Oaks with no announcements and no fanfare.¹⁴ Rather than celebrating the structure's reprieve, Houstonians were left wondering if it was really safe at all.

Why do so many people feel that the River Oaks Theater is historically significant and worth saving? What makes a theater historically significant? According to the League for Historic American Theaters, which works to save historic theaters across the country, a historic theater must be at least fifty years old and possess historical, architectural, and societal importance.¹⁵ The broad context of the history of the River Oaks Theater reveals its significance.

By changing with the times, the River Oaks Theater has managed to stay in business for over seventy years. Initially catering to suburban families by offering a safe, family-oriented theater right in the restricted River Oaks community, the River Oaks Theater adapted when television, drive-ins, and technology threatened the existence of older theaters. It persevered by showing repertory films and undergoing a massive renovation. The theater's history provides a guidepost through which to observe the movie industry's changes from the 1940s to today, the shifts in American culture and values, and the impact of this theater on this history of Houston and River Oaks.

Built at the end of the Art Deco and Art Moderne movement, the River Oaks Theater is significant architecturally

as one of the last Art Deco theaters in town, marking the end of the Art Deco era. Both architectural trends influenced so much more than buildings and design. They also represented the struggle between tradition and the future, between nature and industry. The Art Deco movement affected the way that people thought about industry, about transportation, and even about people. Everything was streamlined to become perfect and efficient. This impact was felt in Houston and around the world.

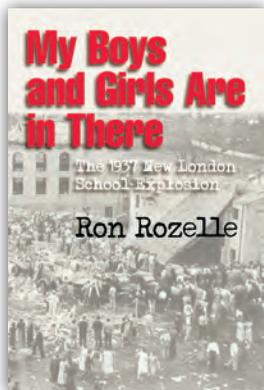
From a societal perspective, the theater's development was affected by the history of Houston as it grew into an industrial center. The developers of the River Oaks Community saw that potential growth and created a community to accommodate the people of discerning taste that would live there. The River Oaks Theater, in turn, helped to shape society and spread modern culture. Most people can recall trips to the movie theater for the social interactions and films' ability to transport them to another world and, perhaps, shape who they became. This has created a very personal connection for people with movie theaters.

While progress and profit act as powerful motivators, which have a place in free market America, sometimes we have to think with our hearts as well as our heads. Movies and movie theaters represent a part of the history of society, communities, and individuals that still play an important role in our culture. Theaters across the country have been restored and renovated, causing a revitalization of surrounding areas and business growth. Houston's own Alabama Theater's renovation into a bookstore accomplished that until the Barnes and Noble displaced it. When chain stores seen in cities all over the world replace independent businesses, it destroys the unique culture of that city. The River Oaks Theater played an integral part in shaping Houston into what it is today. Preserving the theater will ensure that it continues contributing to the Houston community well into the future.

Ramona L. Hopkins received her Masters of Arts in U.S. history from the University of Houston in 2009. She is currently working in the public school setting in southern Iowa.

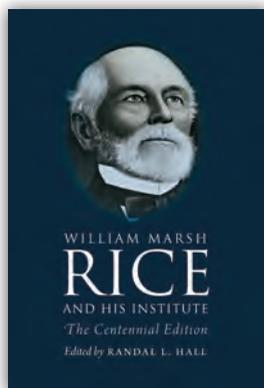
News Updates & Books *by Barbara Eaves*

BOOKS



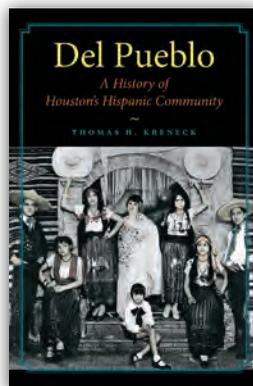
Ron Rozelle's *My Boys and Girls Are in There: The 1937 New London School Explosion* (Texas A&M Press, 2012, \$24.95) is an excellent telling of the worst school disaster in the history of the United States. A spark ignited natural gas beneath the New London School in East Texas, killing more than 300 people — most of them children. The event led the Texas Legislature to pass two bills. The first required the addition of the faintly repulsive

odorant now found in natural gas, and the second specified that only trained and certified engineers can work with gas line connections. It was Walter Cronkite's first big story — and one, he later said, was more heart-wrenching than any war story he covered. Rozelle's father helped on the night of the disaster, but he could never talk about it, prompting the author to research what actually happened. He tells the story so well that it moved this writer to tears.



William Marsh Rice and his Institute: The Centennial Edition by Randall L. Hall (Texas A&M Press, 2012, \$25.00) fleshes out a fascinating man we know too little about. Rice, an entrepreneur who cleared \$2,000 in his first business venture before the age of twenty, came to Texas in 1838, made a fortune in his twenty-five years here, and held on to it through the Civil War. His friends on the Houston School Board encouraged the

childless millionaire to give money to improve Houston's schools, but Rice felt that the city was responsible for public education. Nevertheless, Rice decided to endow a "public library and institute for the advancement of literature, science and art" in Houston. He initially set aside \$200,000 for the project but later designated most of his \$4.6 million fortune to go toward it. Implementing Rice's bequest required contesting the second Mrs. Rice's will and solving his murder. Since Rice left few instructions, the trustees turned to eminent educators for advice, including Woodrow Wilson, then president of Princeton. Wilson recommended a young man, Edgar Odell Lovett, head of Princeton's department of mathematics and astronomy, and the rest is history. Sylvia Stallings Morris wrote the first edition of this book in 1972 from notes accumulated by Andrew Forest Muir. The editor of this edition and Rice alumnus, Randal L. Hall, is an adjunct associate professor of history at Rice and managing editor of the *Journal of Southern History*.



Thomas Kreneck has updated and revised the 1989 edition of *Del Pueblo: A History of Houston's Hispanic Community* (Texas A&M Press, 2012, \$30.00). He wrote the book originally while working at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, developing the library's Mexican American component. The book relates the rise of Houston's Hispanic population from virtually zero in 1836 (despite the heroism of native-born Tejanos)

to a stunning 37.4 percent of the Houston population today — our fastest growing ethnic group. Unlike cities settled by Spanish/Mexican colonists, Houston was marked by Old South culture and nineteenth century westward expansion. Worsening political and economic conditions in Mexico leading up to the 1910 Mexican Revolution and Houston's emergence as a dominant economic center made it a destination for Mexicans seeking work. Kreneck outlines the discrimination immigrants faced, the development of barrios and the building of communities within Houston, the mix of *gente* of different national backgrounds, problems with undocumented workers, outstanding leaders, education, cultural acceptance, and influence as fully participating urban dwellers. This is a well-written, well-researched, useful book.

NOTES: Kate Kirkland's biography of William Marsh Rice's attorney, *Captain James A. Baker of Houston, 1857-1941* (Texas A&M Press) will be in bookstores on September 20. *Rice University: One Hundred Years in Pictures*, sponsored by the Rice Historical Society, will be in bookstores by October. A crowd-sourced book is in development by "Houston It's Worth It." Submit photos and blurbs to: <http://houstonitsworthit.com/splash-rice.html>.

NEWS

WOODALLEN PHOTO COLLECTION DONATED TO HMRC



Alan Montgomery, a fourth-generation commercial photographer, recently donated a collection of 700,000 photographic images to the Houston Metropolitan Research Center located in the Houston Public Library's Julia Ideson building. Montgomery, his grandfather, father, and agency photographers shot the images that make up the new Woodallen Collection and span the years 1946 to the present. The collection is a significant contribution to Houston history for the lengthy time period it covers and the breadth of subject matter.

SCULPTURE ON CAPITOL GROUNDS HONORS TEJANOS

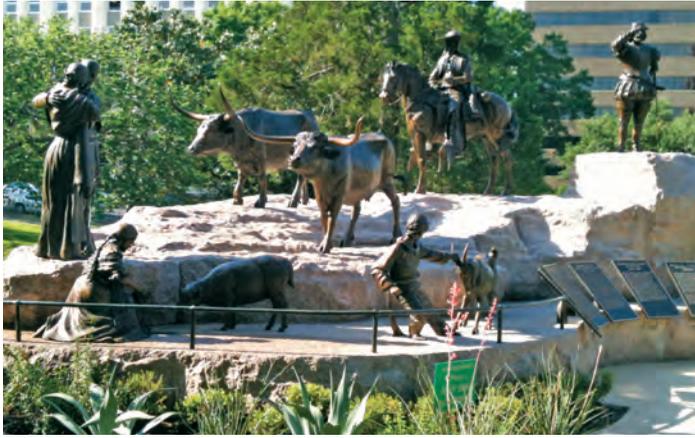


Photo by Jaime Beaman, Casabella Architects.

Ten bronze figures added to the State Capitol grounds tell the story of the Spanish, Mexican, and Tejano presence in Texas since 1519. The highest figure is an explorer, then a vaquero on his Spanish mustang, a longhorn cow and bull, and a ranching family. The idea for the monument came from McAllen physician Cayetano Barrera, who visited the Capitol in 2000 and asked, “Where is the first 300 years of Texas history?” Laredo native Armando Hinojosa began work on the sculpture in 2003. It took three bills to approve the monument and its placement at the front gate of the Capitol and a privately matched appropriation of over \$1 million. Rep. Richard Peña Raymond commented, “The monument seems to have always been here; perhaps it is because **WE** have always been here.”

PRESERVATION HOUSTON

The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance has a new name, a new home, and a new logo; but its mission to preserve and appreciate Houston’s architectural and cultural historic resources remains the



same as at its founding thirty-four years ago. No change in staff; no change in membership. GHPA had officed in the JPMorgan Chase Building, still called the Gulf Building by some, until it sold. “We’ll always be grateful to Chase Bank and its predecessor, Texas Commerce Bank, for donating GHPA’s office space for more than twenty years,” said executive director Ramona Davis. New contact information: 713-510-3990, contact@preservationhouston.org, www.preservationhouston.org.

TIJERINA MARKER REDEDICATED

The Harris County Historical Commission presided over the rededication of a Texas state historical marker honoring Felix Tijerina at the site of his flagship restaurant at 904 Westheimer (now Uchi, a Japanese restaurant). Young Felix immigrated to Texas from Mexico in 1915, found a job as a busboy, took English classes at night, and opened the first Felix Mexican Restaurant in 1937. During his tenure as national president of the League of United Latin American

Citizens (LULAC) from 1954 until 1960, LULAC spread from five councils to a nationwide organization. He also implemented the “Little Schools of the 400” program, which taught Spanish-speaking children a core vocabulary of 400 English words before they entered first grade and became the model for Head Start.



Tijerina marker rededication, left to right: Ernest Eguia, a member of LULAC for 60+ years; Dorothy Caram, Ph.D.; Benny Martinez; Judge Ruben Guerrero; and Loretta Williams.

Photo courtesy of Loretta Williams.



SHUMATE HEADS A COMBINED HOUSTON PUBLIC MEDIA

Lisa Trapani Shumate, an Emmy Award-winning veteran of the television industry was named executive director and general manager of a new umbrella organization combining the operations of public radio stations KUHF-FM and KUHA-FM and public television station KUHT (Channel 8). Houston Public Media is located in the Melcher Center for Public Broadcasting on the University of Houston campus. It has an annual budget of \$25 million, 165 staff members, and 65,000 individual contributors. Shumate reports to UH Provost John Antel. Previously, she worked for Belo Corporation as director of programming and marketing for KHOU (CBS, Channel 11) and as state-wide sales and marketing manager. Before that, she spent eleven years with KTRK (ABC, Channel 13), rising from anchor to manager of marketing and special projects. In 2010, she won a community service Emmy for “Star of Hope for the Holidays.”

TRADER JOE’S TO OPEN IN ALABAMA THEATER

Specialty grocer Trader Joe’s, a quirky, California-based specialty food chain, will open three stores this year in the Houston area – one in the historic Alabama Theater, at 2922 South Shepherd. Preservation Houston has focused public attention on the theater since 2006, when the group heard of its potential demolition. The group ramped up its efforts in



Photo by Jim Parsons.

2010, when plans to gut the building for a warehouse-style office supply store were revealed. Today, Trader Joe's expects to incorporate some of the theater's remaining interior elements, although its signature murals were demolished in 2011.

WATSON IS 2012-2013 TSHA PRESIDENT

At TSHA's annual meeting, Fort Worth physician Watson C. Arnold assumed the 2012-2013 presidency, Gregg Cantrell became first vice president, and John L. Nau, III was elected second vice president. New directors are: Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson, Jane Cook Barnhill, James H. Clement, Jr., Lynn Denton, Kay Bailey Hutchison, and Emilio Zamora. The society named three 2012 Fellows who have excelled in Texas history research, teaching, and scholarship: J. P. Bryan of Houston, for his development and dissemination of Texas history; Cynthia E. Orozco, chair of the history and humanities department at Eastern New Mexico University, an influential figure in Mexican American scholarship; and Frances Brannen Vick of Dallas, recognized for writing, editing, and publishing. See www.TSHAonline.org.

TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS AWARDS

The Texas Institute of Letters has awarded Houstonian Steven Fenberg its Carr P. Collins prize for nonfiction for his biography of Jesse H. Jones, *Unprecedented Power: Jesse Jones, Capitalism, and the Common Good*. Stephen Harrigan of Austin won the Jesse H. Jones Fiction award for *Remember Ben Clayton*. Gary Cartwright received the Lon Tinkle award for his distinguished career. Perhaps best known for his four-decade-long association with *Texas Monthly*, Cartwright has also written novels, nonfiction books, and screenplays. These and thirteen other winners split \$22,000 in prize money.



Steven Fenberg

POMEROY IS "HERO OF SAN JACINTO"

The San Jacinto Conservancy named C. David Pomeroy, Jr.—Conservancy founding member, active member of several local historical groups, and meticulous Texas history scholar—as its first "Hero of San Jacinto." Pomeroy, an attorney and fourth-generation Pasadenan, manages the family oil and gas business founded in 1895 by his great-grandfather to drill water wells. The Pomeroy Homestead



was donated to the City of Pasadena as a museum and appears on the National Registry of Historic Places. Pomeroy wrote *Pasadena, The Early Years*, published his research on Vince's Bridge in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, wrote two articles for the *New Handbook of Texas*, and is a colonel in the Texas Army.

THC HONORS FIREFIGHTERS



Governor's Award recipients are, from left to right: Robert Crossman, Jeff Sparks, Gov. Rick Perry, THC Chair Sheri Krause, Glen Gillman, Michael Lloyd, David Riskind, and Greg Creacy.

Photo courtesy of Texas Historical Commission.

Gov. Rick Perry and the Texas Historical Commission presented the Governor's Award for Historic Preservation to six members of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Wildland Firefighting Team for their heroic efforts in state parks during last year's drought. The fires began in April in Possum Kingdom, threatened the Davis Mountains, then broke out near Bastrop, a National Historic Landmark. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) developed all three parks during the Great Depression. The 100+ people who fought these fires preserved most of the CCC buildings. "They saved both lives and part of our history while risking their own lives and comfort in unimaginable conditions," said Perry.

EVENTS

GLO SYMPOSIUM: The GLO's third annual symposium, "The Civil War in Texas: Death, Disease and Minié Balls," will be held Saturday, September 1, at the Thompson Conference Center, University of Texas at Austin. Speakers include: Rick McCaslin and Alexander Mendoza from University of North Texas, Don Frasier and Robert Maberry from McMurry University, Jerry Thompson from Texas A&M, and Houston attorney Ed Cotham. The \$50 fee includes parking; lunch is optional. Visit www.GLO.Texas.gov or www.savetexashistory.org.

BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP: History Boat Tours on Buffalo Bayou run one Saturday per month, September through December, 10 a.m. to noon. Guide Louis Aulbach, author of *Buffalo Bayou: An Echo of Houston's Wilderness Beginnings*, shares stories of Houston's founders and places, animals, and events along the bayou. Capacity is twenty-one, fare is \$40. Reservations required. Contact Jessalyn Ballard: 713-752-0314 or jballard@buffalobayou.org.

CELEBRATE RICE: From October 10-14, 2012, Rice University celebrates its centennial. A gazillion activities are planned for the five days in October, but some have already begun. Banners with snapshots of a century of Rice life hang everywhere on campus. Check <http://centennial.rice.edu> for schedules and ticket information. For more on public art, see <http://publicart.rice.edu>.



OCT. 10: The Centennial Lecture Series begins.

OCT. 11: The Centennial Lecture Series continues, and William Bolcom's newly-commissioned *Ninth Symphony: A Short Symphony in One Movement* will premiere that evening.

OCT. 12 (actual birthday): Events include: academic procession, keynote address, picnic, panel of university presidents, and student research and civic engagement poster session.

OCT. 13: The dedication of Edgar Odell Lovett sculpture; tours of public art on campus, including new works by James Turrell and Jaume Plensa; class reunions; and Rice vs. UT-San Antonio football game will take place.

OCT. 14: Chamber concert in Shepherd School.

HOUSTON SEMINAR will sponsor a lecture series about Rice University and a campus tour. The lectures will be held in the Kyle Morrow Room in Rice's Fondren Library from 7:00 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. For information and registration, visit www.houstonseminar.org.

OCT. 3: Kate Kirkland on Capt. James A. Baker.

OCT. 18: John Boles on Rice until World War II.

OCT. 24: Melissa Kean on Rice since World War II.

OCT. 31: Stephen Fox on Rice's architectural history.

NOV. 3: Campus walking tour led by Stephen Fox, 10:00 a.m. to noon, Sallyport at Lovett Hall.

SAN JACINTO MUSEUM OF HISTORY ASSOCIATION will host a "Special Evening with Texas History" fund-raising dinner at the San Jacinto Monument on Tuesday, November 13, 2012. The event will honor Douglas Brinkley, professor at Rice University, fellow at James Baker III Institute, political commentator, and author of *Cronkite*. Sponsors and table reservations, call the museum at 281-479-2421. Limited seating available.



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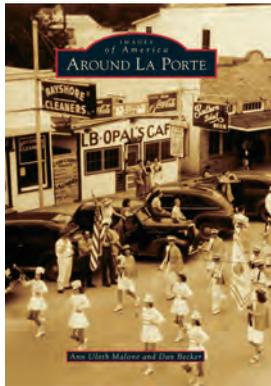
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Arcadia Books Look to Houston's Coastal Neighbors

By Debbie Z. Harwell

The Arcadia books reviewed here are part of the publisher's "Images of America" series and deal with communities surrounding Houston—La Porte, Texas City, and Lake Jackson—all cities that have played a role in the region's success.

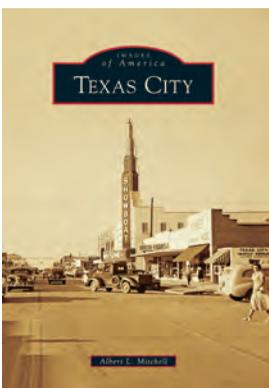


AROUND LA PORTE by Ann Uloth Malone and Dan Becker weaves its way through La Porte's development from its founding in 1892 to the mid-1950s, exploring business, education, recreation, transportation, and La Porte's citizens. Early on, flat-bottom boats on Buffalo Bayou offered the best way to get to La Porte, which had no roads coming into town. Railroads began running in 1895, and with the proliferation of roads

and automobiles, by the 1920s and 1930s as many as 10,000-20,000 people came to La Porte on weekends to visit Sylvan Beach. The images take us back to a time when bath houses were filled with men in seersucker suits and straw hats, and women dressed in their Sunday best before donning demure bathing costumes to enjoy the cool bay waters.

The captions tell interesting stories of La Porte's leading citizens—people like Sam Houston, Sidney Sherman, James Morgan, Lorenzo de Zavala, and Ross Sterling. However, equally intriguing are pictures of less well-known individuals: Emma Seelye, who masqueraded as a man to join the Union army; the Weavers who received a furnished house from the city for being the first couple to marry there; Viola DeWalt who started teaching black children in a one-room school house in 1909; and businesswoman Gertrude Ackerly, shown riding a bicycle, whose foresight preserved many of La Porte's vintage images.

La Porte's founders set a goal to establish "a great commercial center and leading harbor on the coast of Texas." Malone and Becker do an excellent job through the caption-narrative of demonstrating how the city managed to achieve this despite facing challenges from multiple fires and hurricanes that threatened its future.

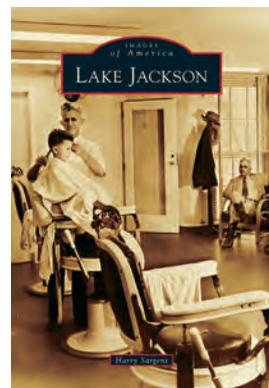


TEXAS CITY by Albert L. Mitchell primarily focuses on the community in the 1950s and 1960s, with just a small group of images on the earlier years. Originally called Shoal Point, Texas City grew out of a vision to create an industrial complex with a deep-water port and rail lines near a growing city. Texas City Refining Company (now Valero) opened the first oil refinery there in 1908 followed by a series of others run by industry

leaders. One of the more interesting images in the book shows a two-page spread of Sixth Street looking toward the bay, and highlights the many modes of transportation in use in 1913, including horse and buggy, automobile, and electric

trolley. In 1915, Texas City completed a five-mile dike to prevent Galveston Bay waters bringing in sand that repeatedly forced the town to re-dredge the channel leading to the community. The dike continues to be a favorite recreational attraction and fishing pier.

A few images show the devastation of the 1947 disaster, which occurred when a ship carrying ammonium nitrate exploded, killing over 560 people and injuring thousands. Others demonstrate the effects of storms like Hurricane Carla in 1961. People from the area will delight in the many photos of businesses from grocery stores to clothing stores to gas stations, such as Johnny Mitchell's Texaco on Texas Avenue that grew into one of the largest lawn mower repair shops in the country. Notable events pictured show the Key Club Pajama Parade, the Pard Pet Parade, and the opening of the city's white municipal pool in 1951, which featured the "Corkettes," a synchronized swim team from Houston's Shamrock Hotel. Perhaps most amusing is the booking and arrest of a horse, shown escorted into a jail cell, on an unknown charge. Many of the photographs in the book were taken by the author's father who was born in Texas City the year before its incorporation.



LAKE JACKSON by Harry Sargent is sure to please anyone from Brazosport. Sargent briefly details the history of the sugar cane and cotton plantations, which encompassed approximately 3,000 acres, owned by Abner Jackson. Family disputes eventually led to the land being sold, and other ventures failed before Dow Chemical Company purchased the land in 1938 for a plant to recover magnesium from seawater. The urgency

for the facility intensified when the country entered World War II, both for the magnesium and the synthetic rubber it produced. Plant manager, A. P. Beutel worked with Alden Dow, son of the company's founder, to set up one of the nation's first designed communities for the people building and operating a plant.

Dow organized "Camp Chemical," a temporary housing area, which was completed in one month and became the largest city in Brazoria County at one point. In addition to cottages and barracks, it included a cafeteria, school, store, ballpark, entertainment hall, firehouse, and police station.

The book's images trace this progression from prairie to plant to the city of Lake Jackson, which incorporated in 1944. It explores the growing population, the community's culture, educational institutions, and politics.

These three communities add to the rich heritage of our region, and these books commemorating them offer an interesting glimpse into the past.

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