A photograph of Terry Hershey, an elderly woman with short white hair, smiling warmly. She is sitting on the ground in a lush, green field with tall grasses and some bare tree branches in the background. She is wearing a light-colored cardigan over a patterned top, a necklace, and a watch. Her right hand is resting on her chin, and she is holding a book or folder in her left hand.

*“Things come and go  
and sometimes they  
go away entirely and  
sometimes somebody  
resurrects them.”*

*—Terry Hershey*

# Houston’s Environmental Legacy: Terry Hershey, Community, and Action

*By Teresa Tomkins-Walsh*

Houston has a rich environmental past. From Joseph Heiser's Outdoor Nature Club and the garden clubs in the early twentieth century to Sarah Emmott's Texas Beaches Unlimited in the 1950s and Terry Hershey's Save Buffalo Bayou Campaign in the mid-1960s, these groups laid the foundations for a strong environmental community. Throughout, Houston activists fashioned a legacy of conservation, preservation, and environmental action in Houston that continues today.

More than forty years ago, Terry Tarlton Hershey became the most visible representative of environmental action in Houston as she fought to preserve the natural beauty of Buffalo Bayou west of Shepherd Drive. She continues as a *magna mater* in the environmental community, but her campaign to save Buffalo Bayou drew in part from a coterie of Houstonians committed to wilderness recreation and urban beautification, organized in the wake of the First World War. Eventually, through Terry Hershey's collaborative efforts and influence, an environmental community emerged to address the full spectrum of environmental issues.

Terry Tarlton moved from Fort Worth to Houston in the 1950s to marry Jake Hershey. The couple spent the better part of ten years sailing international seas in yachting competitions. When Terry was in Houston, she joined in activities sponsored by the Junior League and garden clubs, but it was 1966 when, by chance, she discovered her avocation.

Hershey's debut on Houston's environmental stage came in 1966 when she and several other Memorial area residents observed an area along Buffalo Bayou near Chimney Rock Road ravaged by fallen trees and bulldozed undergrowth. They soon learned that Harris County Flood Control District was re-routing Buffalo Bayou without public notification. Outraged by the condition of the bayou and the county's failure to proffer public notification, Terry Hershey discovered and then joined the Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association. She quickly became its most visible activist, energizing the association to move beyond its prior desultory efforts to monitor projects along Buffalo Bayou.

Sociologists identify three phases for social movements, which Save Buffalo Bayou followed, beginning with this "precipitating event." Observing the damage to Buffalo Bayou was a call to action and life changing for Terry Hershey. Once she realized that Harris County officials would not change course, Hershey embarked on the next stage of a social movement: mobilization. Hershey contacted neighbors who shared the bayou surrounds, then other associates, including members of a number of garden clubs and the Houston branch of her University of Texas sorority.<sup>1</sup>

After alerting this circle of friends and acquaintances to the need for action, Hershey appealed to other organizations. An obvious choice for preservation volunteers was the Outdoor Nature Club. Founded by Joseph Heiser in 1923, the Outdoor Nature Club studied flora and fauna, organized wilderness outings, and spearheaded

protection and conservation of the Little Thicket Sanctuary in the Big Thicket and the Vingtune Islands in Trinity Bay. According to Hershey, Joseph Heiser was Houston's John Muir. He had campaigned to preserve holly along Buffalo Bayou during the 1920s and actively promoted the natural assets of the Houston Gulf Coast region. Both Houston Garden Club and River Oaks Garden Club had been involved since the 1920s in wilderness recreation and urban beautification and had supported Heiser's programs for the Outdoor Nature Club.<sup>2</sup>

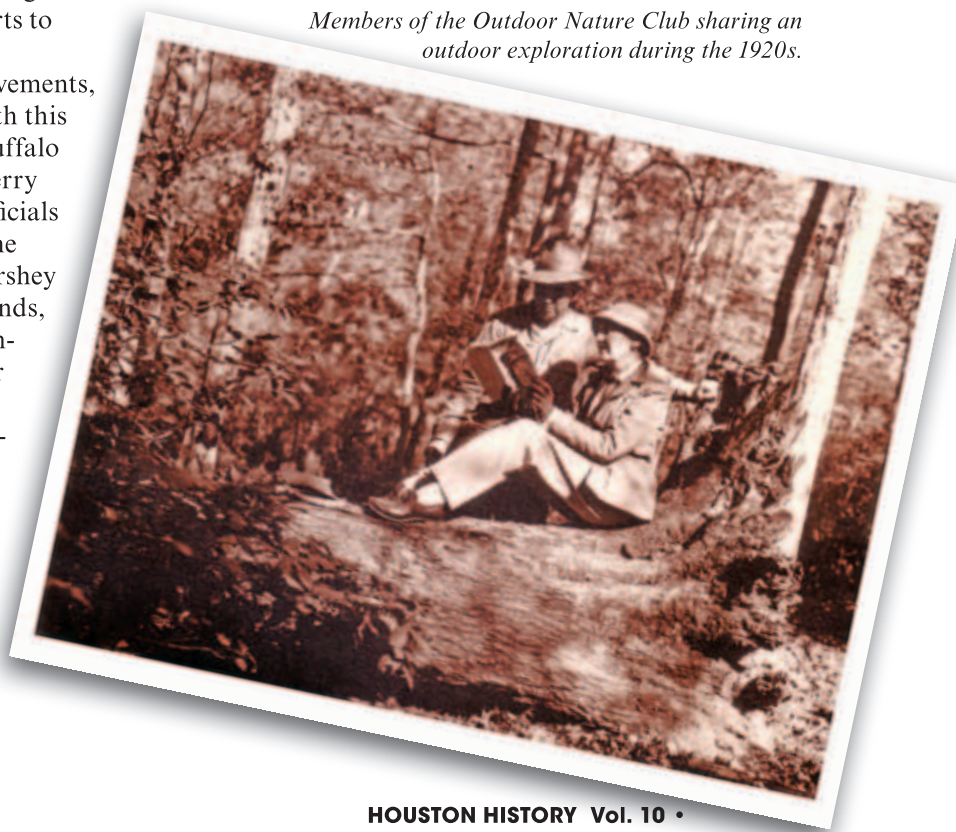
Because Hershey was a relative newcomer to Houston and had spent only sporadic intervals in town during her first decade as a resident, she depended on the help of those embedded in the community. Sarah Emmott was among those who stepped forward to help in the early days of the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign. Emmott was the daughter-in-law of Catherine Emmott who had waged the campaign to designate and preserve Memorial Park in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup>

With Emmott, Hershey engaged an experienced conservationist. Sarah and Army Emmott were longstanding members of the Outdoor Nature Club. In the late 1950s, they along with other club members formed Texas Beaches

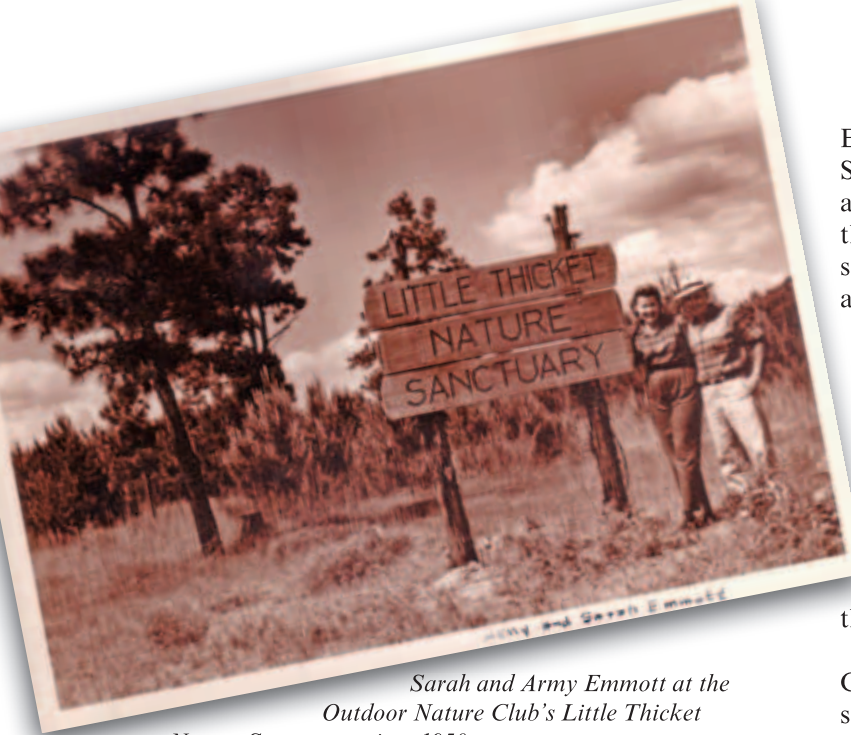


*Joseph Heiser as a young man, circa 1920s.*

*Members of the Outdoor Nature Club sharing an outdoor exploration during the 1920s.*



◀ *Terry Hershey has addressed numerous environmental issues in Houston since the 1960s.*  
Photo courtesy of author. All other photos courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



*Sarah and Army Emmott at the Outdoor Nature Club's Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary, circa 1950s.*

Unlimited to challenge a Texas Supreme Court decision that allowed private ownership of shoreline property along the Gulf Coast, a decision that opened the way for oil drilling along Texas beaches.<sup>4</sup>

Working with Anella Dexter, Sarah Emmott spent days and nights researching to determine that public access to Texas beaches was a legally-upheld residual from Spanish law. They worked in libraries, copied notes by hand, and typed them laboriously at home. Texas Representative Bob Eckhardt of Houston agreed that beaches were a public resource to be preserved for the future. Facing tremendous opposition and supported by some legislative technicalities, Eckhardt's Texas Open Beaches Law passed on July 16, 1959, the first such law passed in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

As an experienced and successful campaigner, Sarah Emmott volunteered her voice, energy, and money to the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign. Joe Heiser, the Emmotts, and garden club members added an Old Houston context to the campaign, but Hershey's mobilization efforts in television interviews, newspaper coverage, and town meetings attracted newcomers to the campaign.<sup>6</sup>

Appealing for support in the campaign to save Buffalo Bayou during a television news segment, Hana Ginzburg was inspired and offered her services for the first time in an environmental action. Ginzburg joined the Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association and set up a table in Memorial Park to collect 2,000 signatures supporting a re-study of Buffalo Bayou flood management plans and documenting abuses along the bayou, foreshadowing the incredible energy and tenacity that she applied to the preservation of Armand Bayou in 1970.<sup>7</sup>

A "drawing of the battle lines" commenced after a Commissioners' Court hearing in April 1966 when commissioners agreed to cease work for six months. Campaigners remained skeptical and continued their efforts to appeal to Congress and the Army Corps of Engineers at the federal level. Newly elected to Congress, George H. W. Bush began his term in January 1967 representing Terry Hershey's district. Bush became interested in the campaign and invited Hershey to testify before the Appropriations Sub-Committee in April 1967. Successful in their appeal to Congress to order a re-study and have the Army Corps of Engineers cease working on Upper Buffalo Bayou, Bush and Hershey were less effective in convincing local flood control authorities to reconsider destructive flood control technologies.

With deeply rooted battle lines, Save Buffalo Bayou entered the third and longest phase of a social movement: entrenchment. During this phase, lasting from 1967 to 1971, Terry Hershey and those fighting to preserve Buffalo

HANA GINZBARG'S ROLE was singular and instrumental in the campaign to preserve Armand Bayou as "a small urban wilderness reserve" and protect it from impending residential development. Armand Bayou presented a significantly different challenge from Buffalo Bayou. Friendswood Development Company owned the land surrounding Armand Bayou. As preserved by the campaign, Armand



*Hana and Arthur Ginzburg on Armand Bayou, undated.*

Bayou includes 2,500 acres of the natural wetlands forest, and prairie and marsh habitats once abundant in the Houston/Galveston area. In 1964, however, when a member of the Outdoor Nature Club had proposed a nature sanctuary, company executives were less than enthusiastic. After extended negotiations, the company refused to donate the land but agreed to sell if preservationists could meet the price, so raising the required money became a centerpiece of the campaign. By 1969, the City of Pasadena held municipal jurisdiction over the area after rebuffing Houston's annexation advances. Pasadena, a largely industrial and working class area, embraced a park project that would bring the area recreational and environmental ambience. Money, land, and development were the triggers in the Armand Bayou preservation campaign, rather than the contest with local and federal government policy that characterized the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign.\*

\*Hana Ginzburg, "How Armand Bayou Park and Nature Center Came to Be: Setting the Record Straight," transcript of talk for Armand Bayou volunteer organization, October 13, 2005, Hana Ginzburg Papers, Box 1, Folders 1-5, courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



*Terry Hershey conducting a meeting of the CEC Land Use Planning Subcommittee in 1970.*

Bayou continued to challenge the Army Corps of Engineers, Harris County Flood Control, and Commissioners' Court. Activists studied and proposed new technologies, conducted community education campaigns, and appealed to local and federal authorities at every opportunity.<sup>8</sup>

Houston's Save Buffalo Bayou campaign finally succeeded in 1971. Passage of the National Environmental Policy Act required that the Army Corps of Engineers request public input on an environmental impact statement and schedule a public hearing. With the feedback from Hershey, Ginzburg, and others, the Corps cancelled the Buffalo Bayou project from Barker and Addicks dams to Shepherd Drive. The victory was narrow with only the single project cancelled. Neither technological approach nor political will had been affected. It took almost twenty years of constant challenge before flood control approaches in Houston began to reflect community respect for the natural resources and amenities of the Houston Gulf Coast region.

Early in the mobilization phase of the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign, Hershey realized that quality of life issues in Houston went beyond a single segment of one bayou, and she also encouraged a broader organized effort. By 1969, Hershey and Houston oilman George Mitchell (second president of Buffalo Bayou Association) advocated a change of name and emphasis for the association. "Buffalo" was dropped from the name, and Bayou Preservation Association became a watchdog for all twenty-two watersheds in the region.<sup>9</sup>

While the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign played out, Hershey and sixteen other women organized Citizens Who Care, the forerunner of Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC). CEC's mission was to provide an information nexus for the burgeoning environmental community. Hershey and her colleagues believed that activists should have access to a calendar of events, a resource guide, and community education. In June 1970, CEC members met to organize with Articles of Incorporation and bylaws, and by August, it had twenty-seven member groups.<sup>10</sup>

CEC's first successful outreach effort was an air quality

information campaign that educated and encouraged voters to attend the June 1970 Texas Air Control Board Hearing. CEC's second major undertaking, carried out over the second half of 1970, was a Land Use Planning Subcommittee sponsored by the Sam Houston Resource Conservation and Development Area. The subcommittee planned to study existing legislation first, define current and projected problems, and finally make recommendations for future legislation and policy. Terry Hershey acted as co-chair along with chair Leo Theiss. She assigned study areas: the Sierra Club assumed responsibility for reporting on the National Land Use Policy of 1970, the Junior Bar Association helped with interpretation of existing bills and policies, Houston-Galveston Area Council reported on the other councils of government in Texas and elsewhere, Planned Parenthood studied population trends, and the Audubon Society researched activities of other Audubon chapters regarding land use issues, and so forth.<sup>11</sup>

As work of the subcommittee continued into fall 1970, Theiss and Hershey set up a meeting to include the "real estate and development community." Having received acceptances to five of eight invitations the day before the meeting, the plan went forward. Only a representative from the Houston Board of Realtors attended. Neither the development community nor local governments were ready in the 1970s for the recommendations of the CEC's Land Use Subcommittee, which recommended eight actions, including support for a National Land Use Policy Act, (S.B. 3354), proposal to amend the Water Resources Planning Act (79 Stat. 244), acceleration of soil surveys, and strengthening Soil & Water Conservation Districts.<sup>12</sup>

Successful culmination of the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign strengthened Houston's maturing environmental community as new organizations emerged and confronted entrenched infrastructure problems. Hershey's influence expanded with her local activism and her participation on the boards of directors of national organizations. Although controversial, Hershey's CEC work on land use issues prepared her for a challenging opportunity.<sup>13</sup>



*Ada Grundy, Terry Hershey, and Hana Ginzburg, founding members of Citizens Who Care, attending a CEC event, circa 2002.*

Initially focused on preventing destruction of Upper Buffalo Bayou, the Save Buffalo Bayou campaign also highlighted problems associated with weak or non-existent land use policies. By the early 1970s, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) appeared to offer a partial solution to escalating flood damages for communities and individuals, but local government resistance to mandatory land use policies threatened the potential benefit of the NFIP across the country.

In Harris County, a history of anti-zoning and unregulated development threatened to undermine county government's considerations in applying to the NFIP. The Save Buffalo Bayou campaign prepared activists with sufficient community standing to counterbalance forces hostile to land management policies and encouraged Harris County Commissioners' Court to adopt the minimum land use policies necessary to apply for NFIP coverage. Having succeeded, with the help of the National Environmental Policy Act, in defeating a destructive neighborhood flood control project during the 1960s, supporters of Save Buffalo Bayou acquired sufficient skills, voice, and influence to have some persuasive effect on Houston and Harris County governments.

When Harris County officials formed the Harris County Flood Control Citizens' Advisory Task Force to consider application to NFIP, development interests dominated appointees, but commissioners also appointed representatives from the environmental community, Terry Hershey among them. Deliberations were rancorous, but ultimately the Task Force recommended application to the NFIP with the required land use limits.<sup>14</sup>

Although Bayou Preservation Association, Citizens' Environmental Coalition, and the environmental presence on Harris County Flood Control Task Force offered a voice supporting what became later in the century "quality of life," "sustainability," and "green" positions, individuals associated with those efforts often suffered disparagement from the development community and segments of local government. Explanations are understandable.

*Houston's green heritage is evident in the archival collection of The Park People.*



*Terry Hershey and Glenda Barrett at an event for The Park People, 1981.*

Development and government interests had been synonymous since Houston's founding; challenges were rare. Bayou Preservation Association emerged during the 1960s as a vehicle for protest and, after a successful campaign, maintained a watchdog posture to identify and challenge watershed management policies. Many of the Buffalo Bayou protestors, including Hershey, Emmott, and Ginzburg, founded CEC. In the 1970s, both organizations carried the stain of local protest action.<sup>15</sup>

By 1978, The Park People emerged as a very different kind of organization from its predecessors, in both function and perception. From its inception, The Park People sparked a collaborative spirit by operating from a coalition mindset. Where Bayou Preservation Association reflected a spirit of challenge, The Park People developed a reputation for consensus building. Glenda Barrett, one of the ground-floor organizers, was a consummate people person who set the organizational tone for thirty years. Ann Hamilton, The Park People's first executive director, made diplomacy a priority. However, one of the early actions of The Park People was formation of a Flood Control Committee to identify bayou lands that could be converted to parks.<sup>16</sup>

When The Park People materialized sixty-six years after Arthur Comey cited Houston's urgent need for park space, Houston still faced a critical lack of parks and open space. A National Urban Recreation study conducted in 1977 found Houston and Harris County deficient (104th in the nation) in park space. Terry Hershey and Glenda Barrett initiated The Park People as an organization dedicated to improving parks and open space in Houston to demonstrate that there was sufficient interest in Houston to support a field office for the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation headed by Cris Delaporte, an undersecretary of the Interior.<sup>17</sup>

The Park People's original mission was advocacy, and their goal to assist other groups in acquiring and maintaining park land. That mission included raising Harris County residents' awareness of the importance of urban parks, communicating a park ethic, and preserving and augmenting park space. Over the years, The Park People organized projects such as Jesse H. Jones Park, drainage and irrigation

for San Jacinto Battleground, landscaping for Project Row Houses in Third Ward, and wildflower planting programs. Another accomplishment was the Greenway Trails Map for Houston-Harris County, which shows 600 miles of actual and proposed greenway trails, parks greater than five acres in area, and parking areas for trails and parks.<sup>18</sup>

Hershey's persona incorporates both the protestor and the peacemaker, a complexity that is apparent now forty years after she first observed the destruction on Buffalo Bayou. Hershey describes herself as a catalyst, as someone who brings people and ideas together. She is also, according to George H. W. Bush, "a force of nature." Hershey works with boundless energy to promote, support, encourage, advise, and listen to people and ideas that reflect her abiding love of nature. Hershey epitomizes historian Stephen Fox's concept of the radical amateur: "heart and soul of the American conservation movement."<sup>19</sup>

Houston is sometimes perceived as a city that sheds its history and looks perpetually to the future. In conservation efforts and environmental causes, however, a legacy of action and concern reaches across the twentieth century to impact public works and government decisions in the twenty-first. That legacy lives through the work of hundreds of activists.

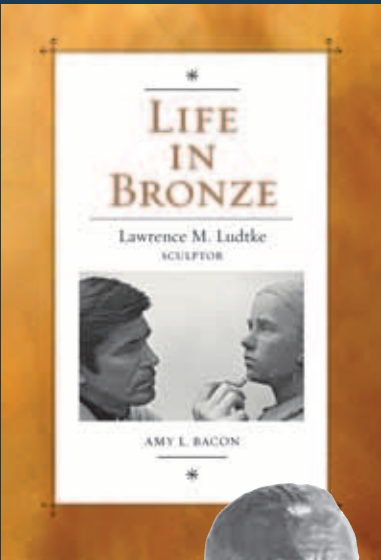
In 1966, Hershey tapped into an established legacy of conservation action. She followed Joe Heiser and Sarah Emmott and established her singular brand of action, encouraging and educating as she mobilized volunteers. Hershey is a

pivotal figure in Houston's environmental past, bridging the wilderness conservation of the first half of the twentieth century with the urban improvements of the early twenty-first century. Because of Terry Hershey, her mentors, and all those she inspired, Houston is a better place to live. 🌱

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

**The environmental collections currently open to the public in the Houston History Archives in Special Collections in the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston include the following:**

- Bayou Preservation Association (BPA), 1929-2003
- Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), 1966-2000
- Sarah and Army Emmott Environmental Papers, 1912-1991
- Hana Ginzburg Papers, 1962-1991
- Terry Tarlton Hershey Papers, 1962-2010 (partial collection)
- Joseph M. Heiser, Jr., Papers, 1897-1987
- Outdoor Nature Club, 1923-2007
- The Park People, 1970-2009
- Scenic Houston – Scenic Texas, 1966-2007
- *This is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale* Film Collection (paper only), 1925-2011




## Life in Bronze

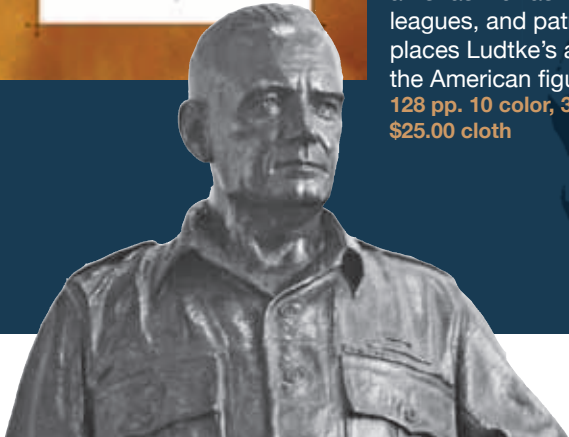
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