



William Clifford Hogg, 1875-1930

## WILL HOGG AND CIVIC CONSCIOUSNESS: HOUSTON STYLE

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A relatively small group of aggressive businessmen has dominated every stage of Houston's history. As David G. McComb wrote in his history of the Bayou City, one of the most important characteristics of Houston's development is that the city "attracted men of enterprise—men willing to promote Houston for their own benefit."<sup>1</sup> From John and Augustus Allen, who founded the city in the 1830s, to the likes of Jesse H. Jones in the twentieth century, enterprising entrepreneurs imbued with the spirit of economic individualism have left an indelible imprint on the history of Houston. As recently as 1976, a New York journalist noted the persistence of that spirit of business-minded individualism when she observed that modern Houston "bets on a different and brutal kind of distinction—of power, motion and sheer energy."<sup>2</sup>

William ("Will") C. Hogg was one of those business-oriented elites whose values and attitudes were important in shaping the face of twentieth-century Houston. Though often ignored by historians, Hogg was perhaps the city's most important civic leader and certainly its most influential advocate of city planning in the 1920s. More importantly, Hogg's career is proof that Houston's business mentality influenced even its most civic-minded citizens and gave their efforts a peculiarly entrepreneurial quality.

Unlike the popular stereotype of Houston's elite businessmen, Will Hogg was neither self-made nor self-taught. He was born in 1875, the eldest of four children fathered by one-time Texas governor James Stephen Hogg. Heir to both his father's real estate fortune and a legacy of public service, Hogg was a graduate of Southwestern University in Georgetown and the University of Texas Law School. Following a frustrating attempt at a legal career in San Antonio, Hogg worked for his father in Austin, and moved to Houston in 1906 to supervise the family's properties. From that point, Hogg's life was an interesting blend of private businessman and public-minded citizen. As a businessman and *major domo* of the Hogg family, he managed an extensive network of investments; simultaneously he used his position and wealth to influence the course of public affairs in Texas. In the state at large, he was particularly interested in improving the University of Texas and protecting its

<sup>1</sup>David G. McComb, *Houston: The Bayou City* (Austin, 1969), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>*New York Times*, February 15, 1976, II, p. 36.

academic integrity from political assaults.<sup>3</sup>

It was for Houston, however, that Hogg reserved much of his civic energy. On a public level, he served as Chairman of the City Planning Commission, actively participated in city politics (particularly the mayoral election of 1928), and generously supported several social welfare and educational agencies. As a private businessman, Hogg frequently preferred to eschew the often frustrating bureaucracy of municipal government in favor of his own personally financed and directed schemes to plan much of the west side of Houston.

The public side of Hogg's civic activity included one of the traditional forms of urban planning in the 1920s, the city planning commission. Appointed head of Houston's commission in April, 1927, by Mayor Oscar Holcombe, Hogg announced both his hopes for the commission and his view of planning generally. "A right city plan will result in great economics in the future, as well as emphasize our duty to dress-up or add to the attractiveness of our city and county as we go along through this life." Based on a long association with the work of many urban planners, Hogg had come to believe that a modern city demanded efficient planning both to hasten its economic growth and to provide a visually pleasing and practical setting in which its inhabitants could work and play. Hogg saw the planning commission as the agency through which such a merger of the "city efficient" and the "city beautiful" could be effected. To that end, he outlined four major areas of concern with which the commission would deal: a major street plan, construction of a civic center, the extension of parks and parkways, and a "fool proof" and sensible zoning plan.<sup>4</sup>

Although Hogg was anxious to see the commission finish its work, he discovered it was powerless to enforce any of its recommendations. From its inception, the commission was designed to be little more than an advisory body. Mayor Holcombe and the city council often ignored the commission's work and, on at least one occasion, allowed the funding for the agency to lapse. Hogg himself had to finance the publication of the commission's final report in 1929. Hogg felt the publication of the report would lay the groundwork for planning projects should a future city administration be more willing to implement city planning. Although its advice usually went unheeded, then, the commission did serve as a showcase for Hogg's commitment to planning and his view of the possibilities of its use.

Like previous civic groups and municipal agencies, the members of the 1927 city planning commission sought to develop a comprehensive zoning plan for Houston.<sup>5</sup> In its final report, the commission listed several benefits of zoning: the protection of life and health, the stabilization of property values, the reduction of premature obsolescence of improvements, the abating of

<sup>3</sup>For a brief discussion of Hogg's early career, see Bruce J. Weber, "Will Hogg and the Business of Reform" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1979), pp. 1-28.

<sup>4</sup>Houston *Chronicle*, April 7, 1927, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>On the failure of zoning in Houston, see McComb, *Houston*, pp. 220-222.

street congestion, and economy in planning utilities.<sup>6</sup> In drawing up its zoning proposal, the commission followed the model Standard State Zoning Enabling Act prepared by the United States Department of Commerce. Like other proposals submitted to Houstonians before and since, the zoning plan failed and Houston, relying on deed restrictions, private planning and luck, remained the largest non-zoned city in the United States.

The mayor and city council were more favorably inclined toward the commission's proposals for a civic center. Hogg's vision of a civic center demonstrated his commitment to urban beautification, efficiency and boosterism. Previous agencies had investigated the need and possible locations for a civic center, but had failed to convince the city to take any action.<sup>7</sup> Hogg decided, on an individual basis, to take control of the situation by buying a large portion of the proposed site, on the northwest side of the downtown area, before speculation inflated prices. Spending over \$260,000, Hogg then managed to convince the city council to hold a bond election for city improvements which would include land for a civic center. He also spent \$1,135 on advertising for the bond amendments which were ultimately approved by the voters.<sup>8</sup>

Demonstrating his business-like approach to acquiring the civic center site, Hogg advised one critic who questioned his relationship to the civic center property, "I assume you will agree that the City should provide, as soon as practicable, conveniently located ground to meet its future requirements for public business, both City and County—in other words, as a farsighted businessman, if you were directing stockholder in our civic corporation, you would provide now for the location of a suitable place for the conduct of City and County business."<sup>9</sup> Later he echoed that attitude when he wrote, "I have taken the same interest in this civic center location that you, as a large stockholder in any private corporation would take in any decisive progressive step involving its future."<sup>10</sup> On still another occasion, Hogg explained his general conception of the project to the mayor:

Such a Civic Center is a powerful stimulus for a right city plan which simply means a definite and persistent striving through physical layout for the greatest comfort, contentment, and happiness of the whole community at the lowest cost in taxes.<sup>11</sup>

As Hogg saw it, the center would increase efficiency, both for the city administration by grouping its various offices in physical proximity, and for local businessmen who could exploit the public attraction of the project for their own purposes. Hogg never

<sup>6</sup>*Report of the City Planning Commission, Houston, Texas*, (1927), p. 102.

<sup>7</sup>William C. Hogg to Oscar Holcombe, June 28, 1927, Hogg Papers (University of Texas Archives, Austin, Texas). Hereafter cited as Hogg Papers.

<sup>8</sup>William C. Hogg to Herbert Hare, May 30, 1925; William C. Hogg to Ross Sterling, April 23, 1926, Hogg Papers. McComb, *Houston*, pp. 140-142.

<sup>9</sup>William C. Hogg to Ross Sterling, April 23, 1926, Hogg Papers.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>William C. Hogg to Oscar Holcombe, March 9, 1927, Hogg Papers.

wavered in his commitment to make the center aesthetically pleasing. He emphasized the need for a reflecting pool to provide an adequate backdrop for the project, and one of his major considerations in advancing the particular site was its proximity to Sam Houston Park. To Hogg the businessman, the potential of the center for advertising and boosting Houston was an important consideration. The center would not only contribute to the beauty and efficiency of Houston, but it would also "advertise our city to the visiting guest."<sup>12</sup>

The civic center was also an important issue in Hogg's most significant participation in city politics, the 1928 mayoralty campaign. For most Houstonians, the campaign was a classic example of the city machine versus the reform candidate. An editorial in the *Houston Gargoyle* reflected the mood of many voters when it asked, "Has anyone in the room ever heard of Tammany Hall . . . ? And has anyone heard of Mr. Vare or Willie Thompson?"<sup>13</sup> The editor pointed out that while Mayor Oscar Holcombe had not yet approached Tammany's machine-like operations, "the danger, as we see it, is in letting any machine get in the saddle."<sup>14</sup> Adding to Holcombe's image as an urban boss were political rallies which emphasized the Mayor's personal improprieties, his lack of honesty and integrity.<sup>15</sup> Cast in the role of the reform candidate, Judge Walter Monteith published campaign posters proclaiming, "All over the country communities have learned that they cannot have Orderly, Intelligent, and Economic development while supporting a Political Machine." These posters concluded with the admonition, "For the Good of the Town Get Rid of the Machine."<sup>16</sup>

Hogg supported Monteith in 1928; his opposition to Holcombe was not, however, based on moral grounds or political ideology, but in his conviction that the Mayor's administration was inefficient in planning for future growth. Holcombe's personal life and public conduct irritated Hogg, but not so much as Holcombe's unwillingness to give even minimal support to city planning. Hogg could contain his personal dislike for Holcombe as long as the Mayor ran an efficient and business-like city government. For Will Hogg, practical results were more important than any moral balance sheet.

Given Hogg's political pragmatism, it is ironic that he was instrumental in affixing the stamp of moral corruption on Holcombe in the 1928 campaign.<sup>17</sup> In 1925—to save the city inflated prices—Hogg bought land at the site recommended by the city planning commission for a civic center. At the same time, Holcombe bought two adjacent lots, subsequently selling them to Ben Andrews for a \$15,870 profit; Andrews in turn sold the land to Hogg for an additional \$15,000 profit, a set of transactions which cost the city about \$30,000.<sup>18</sup> As the 1928 election drew near, the city began condemnation

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Houston Gargoyle*, I (October 2, 1928), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Notes on Monteith Rally, November 17, 1928, Hogg Papers.

<sup>16</sup>Election Poster, Hogg Papers.

<sup>17</sup>William C. Hogg to Mike Hogg, May 8, 1929, Hogg Papers.

<sup>18</sup>*Houston Gargoyle*, I (November 27, 1928), p. 6; William C. Hogg to James Baker, April 29, 1927, Hogg Papers.

proceedings on the land. The Mayor, Hogg and Stephen Pinckney, Hogg's attorney, all testified in a condemnation suit. Hogg's testimony revealed the self-serving actions of the Mayor and provided the final blow to Holcombe's campaign. Holcombe was forced to admit the profit he had made on the transaction, lamely arguing that the ordinance creating the civic center had not yet been passed when the purchases occurred.

Despite Holcombe's obvious indiscretions, Hogg found his lack of commitment to effective city administration more deplorable. Hogg had known of Holcombe's questionable real estate deal as early as 1926 and still continued to support the mayor. Hogg later explained his actions by saying, "I am not now fighting him (Holcombe) because of his infidelity that time to me, but I am fighting him now for many other reasons . . ." He had forgiven Holcombe in 1926, Hogg elaborated, "on the expressed promise that he wouldn't cheat again coupled with his plea that he wanted to have a chance to finish some pet projects that he and I had been working on."<sup>19</sup> Although it is not entirely clear what Hogg meant by "pet projects", Holcombe's support for the planning commission must have figured strongly in Hogg's 1926 decision to endorse the mayor's candidacy; and it was certainly Holcombe's lack of support for the city planning commission that turned Hogg against the Mayor in 1928.

By 1928, Hogg no longer misunderstood Holcombe's intentions. The mayor was not in the "slightest degree in favor of City Planning, though he makes that gesture. He has almost invariably sidetracked or defeated the very suggestions that the City Planning Commission has made so far." Holcombe not only frustrated urban planning, Hogg asserted, but "my contact with him convinces me that he is not sincerely interested in the best welfare of the most people of Houston." Hogg concluded, "I have seen him violate the best ideals of city welfare and construction by wasteful paving, bottle necked street widening, destruction of tree life."<sup>20</sup> By 1928, then, Hogg was convinced that Holcombe had to go, not because he was guilty of misconduct or because his administration was an undemocratic "machine," but because Holcombe had become an obstacle to planning an efficient and beautiful Houston. In Hogg's mind, street paving and the success of the city planning commission loomed larger than \$30,000 in ill-gotten profit or political opportunism.

Hogg's concern for the quality of life in Houston was not confined to construction and politics. He served on the boards of the Houston Foundation and the Houston Social Service Bureau and generously supported the YMCA, the Emma R. Newsboys Home, the Boy Scouts, the Art Museum and the Community Chest. When asked about his massive philanthropy, Hogg responded: "I'm glad to. The government made a mistake originally in not reserving for its own use all the wealth below the soil. What I don't pay back in taxes on the oil that should not have been mine, I'm glad to give away in welfare."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>William C. Hogg to R.M. Farrer, November 27, 1928, Hogg Papers.

<sup>20</sup>*Houston Post*, November 27, 1928, p 1.

<sup>21</sup>Perry McAshan McCall, "The Progressive City During the Frivolous Decade: A Study of Social Concern in Houston, Texas, During the 1920s," (M.A. thesis, Texas A. & M. University, 1971), p. 160.

One of Hogg's deepest commitments was to the Emma R. Newsboys Association, a settlement house for disadvantaged boys. The 1917 Annual Report of the Association warned that "properly directed these underprivileged boys become an asset to the City, State and Nation. Improperly directed . . . [they become] a liability to the businessmen of the community."<sup>22</sup> Hogg's lifelong devotion to efficiency in all aspects of societal endeavors made him especially amenable to the settlement house goal of providing opportunity to disadvantaged boys. When soliciting money for the organization, Hogg continually referred to it as "preventive philanthropy." He explained that "we rescue the boy from the evil influence of the street and constantly endeavor to promote his physical, mental and moral welfare." On another occasion, Hogg claimed, "our five years' service has reduced this delinquency by 90% at an expense of 5% of the standard cost of reformatory work. It is more economical and ennobling to cultivate good habits than to reform bad ones."<sup>23</sup> This overlapping of business and reform theory also characterized Hogg's activities with the Houston Foundation and the Social Service Bureau.

Welfare activities in Houston were haphazard and overlapping. In 1915, the city established the Houston Foundation as "a public trusteeship possessed of expert knowledge of the city's needs in the welfare field."<sup>24</sup> The organization would distribute private funds it raised and whatever public funds the city allocated for welfare. The second step in the modernization of the city's social programs was the establishment of the Social Service Bureau. This semi-public organization consolidated several private charitable organizations "to prevent over-lapping and achieve more carefully coordinated work in Settlements and social centers, public health, kindergartens, playgrounds, humane work for children, and relief and family service."<sup>25</sup> Will Hogg served on the Board of Directors of the Houston Foundation and, for a short period of time, as the head of the Social Service Bureau. He left most of the planning to professional employees, while relying on his own wealth and his ability to raise money to help finance the organizations. He published brochures for each agency, describing the accomplishments and needs of each of them in order to convince Houstonians to support and expand their services.<sup>26</sup>

Hogg's civic aspirations led him to support still other causes that shared in common only the vision of a planned city. He proposed that the city's public schools expand their functions dramatically.<sup>27</sup> He advised the city council to plan ahead and purchase land on the outskirts of the city for an airport so that Houston might become an "air center."<sup>28</sup> He helped lobby for enabling

<sup>22</sup>1917 Annual Report of the Emma R. Newsboy's Association, Hogg Papers.

<sup>23</sup>William C. Hogg to W.S. Jacobs, January 18, 1916; William C. Hogg to James Darrow, January 28, 1916; William C. Hogg to William A. Vinson, January 18, 1916, Hogg Papers. McCall, "The Progressive City," p. 157.

<sup>24</sup>McCall, "The Progressive City," p. 44.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup>William C. Hogg to J.J. Pastoriza, June 28, 1917; William C. Hogg to P.G. Sears, May 16, 1917, Hogg Papers.

<sup>27</sup>William C. Hogg to O.E. Oberholtzer, June 24, 1917, Hogg Papers.

<sup>28</sup>William C. Hogg to Oscar Holcombe, June 16, 1927, Hogg Papers.

legislation at the state level that would permit cities of more than 25,000 inhabitants to require that plats for real estate subdivisions be approved before filing.<sup>29</sup> His interests even extended beyond the city limits, and he supported regional planning in the areas of drainage, good roads, financial and marketing cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

Hogg's public efforts to improve Houston were consistently colored by his business values. His emphasis on efficiency and planning, his assumption that city government was actually a kind of public corporation, his insistence on instilling a business mentality both in the organization of charitable causes and in their recipients, and his penchant for civic boosterism were all persistent themes in Will Hogg's urban consciousness at a public level. Privately, Hogg pursued the same goals with equal zeal and considerably more success. This is particularly true of his most ambitious private civic project: his desire to make the west side of Houston a model of urban life.

The cornerstone of Hogg's vision for the west side was the planned residential community of River Oaks. Throughout the 1920s, builders in almost every major American city sought to create stability and beauty amidst a rapidly urbanizing society. As Sam Bass Warner suggests, "the conditions of the central city which so dismayed the middle class were the product of its failure to control the distribution of income, its failure to regulate housing and working conditions." The result was a "harvest of middle-class fear."<sup>31</sup> In Baltimore, urban flight took the form of Roland Park; in Cleveland, Shaker Heights; for Kansas City, the Country Club District; and in Houston, River Oaks. Many suburban developments appeared in Houston during this era, but most of them were simply "clusters of homes rather than planned communities."<sup>32</sup> Beyond platting and the establishment of basic services, there was seldom any attempt to provide for an entire, viable community. The builders of River Oaks had a more complex understanding of planning. For them, planning was a sophisticated tool that could be used to protect and enhance the beauty of the environment; perhaps most of all, it provided security from the problems of city life and the traditional decay of ramshackle suburban developments. As one River Oaks advertisement proclaimed, "River Oaks Is For All Times."<sup>33</sup>

Will Hogg understood the dark side of urban growth as well as any of his Houston contemporaries. In *Our Story of River Oaks*, he commented, "the beauty and civic efficiency of American cities in general has been blighted by failure to foresee, to gauge, and to direct the dynamic rapidity of their growth and expansion." He claimed, "the hit-or-miss fashion of letting a city sprawl as it will—the sell-out-and-clear-out system of making small acreage developments of fine homes—has marred every city in the United States that

<sup>29</sup>Walter Akers to William C. Hogg, January 18, 1927, Hogg Papers.

<sup>30</sup>William C. Hogg to L.J. Hart, October 30, 1926; William C. Hogg to Ross Sterling, June 23, 1929; William C. Hogg to B. Youngblood, April 16, 1915, Hogg Papers.

<sup>31</sup>Sam Bass Warner, *Street Car Suburbs* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 162-163.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Orson Cook and Barry J. Kaplan, "Civic Elites and Urban Planning: Houston's River Oaks," *East Texas Historical Review*, 15 (Fall, 1977), p. 31.

<sup>33</sup>Clipping, Hogg Papers.

has attained the size of Houston today."<sup>34</sup> Hogg denied the necessity of such decay and sought to protect River Oaks from it. The uniqueness of River Oaks in Houston's development has been missed by few observers as a result. As recently as 1976, one observer noted:

Directly behind the freeways, one short turn takes the driver from the strip into pine and oak-alleyed streets of comfortable and elegant residential communities (including the elite and affluent River Oaks). They have maintained their environmental purity by deed restrictions passed on from one generation of buyers to another. Beyond these enclaves anything goes.<sup>35</sup>

River Oaks' uniqueness, however, was not to be guaranteed by planning alone. It was to be only a part of an entire conversion of the west side of Houston. In addition, Hogg conceived the project as "more than a mere commercial real estate company"; it was to be a "permanent civic corporation." While lecturing one of his partners, Hogg reminded him "we are interested in Houston first, the success of River Oaks second, your own advancement third, and our own compensation last."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Hogg thought this sort of extensive planning, on a reduced scale, could be applied to all financial levels of housing.<sup>37</sup> He sought not to abandon urban America, but to revitalize it by example.

The actual metamorphosis of River Oaks from concept to form is hazy. Probably Will Hogg's brother, Mike, and his friend, Hugh Potter, a prominent member of Houston's real estate community, first conceived the project, though Hogg had already demonstrated a long standing concern for the area because of its high elevation and abundant vegetation.<sup>38</sup> Hogg had become involved in the area when he bought a large section of land along the bayou for a city park.<sup>39</sup> Once the acquisition of park land was completed, he entered into the partnership with Mike and Hugh Potter with unquestioned vigor. Mike Hogg and Hugh Potter had already secured options on two hundred acres near the newly completed River Oaks Country Club. Typically, Hogg wanted to enlarge the project. He asked, "why buy only 200 acres? Why not buy 1,000 more? Why not make this something really big, something the city can be proud of?" Dispatching observers to other planned residential

<sup>34</sup>Hogg Brothers, *Our Story of River Oaks* (1926), pp. 3, 4.

<sup>35</sup>*New York Times*, February 15, 1976, p. 36.

<sup>36</sup>William C. Hogg to Hugh Potter, April 25, 1925; also see Potter's address before the Home Builders and Sub-Dividers Convention in Houston where Potter said, "River Oaks was conceived, and is being executed, primarily as a civic enterprise." Newspaper advertisement entitled "It is Good for Any City to Have its River Oaks," Hogg Papers.

<sup>37</sup>Hogg was involved in several other real estate projects throughout Houston. See John A. Lomax, "Will Hogg—Texan," *Atlantic Month*, 165 (May, 1940), p. 672.

<sup>38</sup>Cook and Kaplan, "Civic Elites," p. 30; William C. Hogg to Hugh Potter, January 3, 1924, suggests that Potter sought monetary support from Hogg early in the venture; also see William C. Hogg to Hugh Potter, April 17, 1924, as proof that Hogg quickly established control over Potter and the project. Hogg Papers.

<sup>39</sup>*Houston Chronicle*, November 30, 1926, p. 10.

projects, particularly J.C. Nichols' Country Club District in Kansas City, the Hogs and Potter undertook the venture.<sup>40</sup>

In the spring of 1924, the parent corporation, Country Club Estates, was organized by Hogg with Hugh Potter serving as the company's president. The corporation completed its first house in the fall of 1925, though a low rate of purchases plagued the first few years of the company's existence. Tall Timbers—the original name for the area—was not a garden spot in the mid-1920s. Muddy streets necessitated the purchase of two truck loads of rubber boots for prospective customers during one 1927 sale.<sup>41</sup> Although sales improved toward the end of the decade, the corporation's losses reached almost a quarter of a million dollars. By 1930, when Hogg died, the brothers had invested almost three million dollars in the enterprise. Even before his death, however, Hogg's energy had helped ensure that the transformed forest would continue to be characterized by its protection of the environment and its sense of security.

Protection of the environment was one of Will Hogg's major concerns as well as one of River Oaks' chief selling points. The 1,000 acre tract, bounded by Memorial Park, Buffalo Bayou, and River Oaks Country Club lent itself to environmental safeguards. Although the business district of Houston was only three miles away, residents of River Oaks sought, physically and psychologically, to remove themselves from the problems of urban life. The more expensive homes inside the area were further buffered by the allocation of the "cheaper" homes on the fringe of the development. Inside the project, "sophisticated landscape, architecture with heavy Beaux Art overtones" enhanced an "atmosphere of rural romanticism." The attempt to duplicate not only the beauty of nature, but some sort of nebulous bucolic feeling, was furthered by "gently curving boulevards, formal esplanades, residential *cul de sacs* and a series of small neighborhood parks." Subterranean utility lines were designed to preserve the view of the sylvan setting. Attempts were made to control traffic through the elimination of alleys and the outright ban of all commercial traffic. The parks and streets were all planted with trees and shrubs except on the esplanades and curves where their absence was designed to provide a sense of spaciousness. A staff of gardeners, carpenters, and architects, paid by a maintenance tax levied by the Home Owners Association, was designed to aid the owners in maintaining the commitment to natural beauty. Even the non-residential areas on the periphery of River Oaks (schools, a shopping center and administrative offices) were designed to blend with a general commitment to a pastoral theme.<sup>42</sup>

In juxtaposition to zoning, rigid deed restrictions were used to protect the financial security and social integrity of the project, and to ensure a continuing commitment to the natural beauty of the area. These regulations ranged from "renovation of existing structures to the placement of garbage cans and

<sup>40</sup>Cook and Kaplan, "Civic Elites," p. 30; Hogg maintained close ties to Nichols throughout the 1920s. When Nichols visited the project in 1925, he claimed it "ranks high among the best subdivisions of this country." Hogg also used a Kansas City firm, Hare and Hare, to landscape River Oaks and to draw up plans for the city planning commission.

<sup>41</sup>*Houston Post*, April 29, 1927, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup>Cook and Kaplan, "Civic Elites," p. 30.

clotheslines," and they "vigorously enforced land use conformity." Even sales signs were forbidden in an attempt to heighten this sense of pastoral isolation.<sup>43</sup>

The salesmen for River Oaks emphasized the uniqueness of their offering. Advertisements asked prospective buyers to view "estates as once made Virginia famous" where "there's laughter and love, where there's a cool breeze in the summer and the pure air of countryside year round." Another solicitation compared River Oaks to a "wild life sanctuary" that "will not be polluted with gasoline fumes and the feathered and furry creatures will not be frightened by the roar of motor cars."<sup>44</sup> The corporation even indulged in some dubious philosophical arguments in attempting to emphasize the "natural" advantages of the project:

How to enjoy the beauties of Nature without sacrificing the comforts and conveniences of civilized life has been a perplexing problem for men ever since they began to dwell together . . . . If the City stirs their intellect, it has a tendency to breed material ideals, and if the country appeals to fine emotions, it often leads to dullness through isolation. Contact with both seems necessary to normal development.

. . . . More in his "Utopia" sought to solve the problem by having people live six months in the city and six months in rural areas. The Country Club Estates . . . is a splendid illustration of how this theory can be carried out in Houston, of how the artist and mechanic can cooperate with Nature to bring about ideal results.<sup>45</sup>

This theme of mixing the values of society and nature was reinforced in a letter circulated to prospective customers. Hugh Potter asked his friends to "witness the transformation of a virgin forest into a garden" by the "big steam roller, and the trench-digging machines, [the] juggernauts of progress." In River Oaks, the visitor could hear the "song and tattoo-clack of the pipefitter" while sitting under "gently swaying pines."<sup>46</sup>

While Hogg and his partners sought to maintain the environmental integrity of River Oaks, they also placed equal emphasis on security for their customers. Security included a guarantee that River Oaks would be reserved for "our kind of people." Although advertisements for the development included the admonition that "whether you choose a \$7,000 cottage or a \$17,000 House or a \$170,000 Mansion—there is a place for you in River Oaks," the minimum cost of \$9,500 for a house and lot placed homes there out of reach of the average buyer. Sales pitches closer to the truth advised prospective buyers, "you will have good neighbors, you may be sure."

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>Houston Chronicle, January 23, 1925, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup>"River Oaks Country Club Estates," (pamphlet, 1924), River Oaks Collection, HMRC, Houston, Texas.

<sup>46</sup>Hugh Potter to Harry O. Heller, October 7, 1926, River Oaks Collection, HMRC; Hogg recognized the artistic and intellectual value of such advertising. At one time, he judged "the stock and trade booklet or folder of pretentious bull-shit . . . [is] part of the game." William C. Hogg to Charles E. Seiler, December 13, 1924, Hogg Papers.

Another claimed residents would have neighbors "who are your kind of people."<sup>47</sup>

Hogg briefly considered selling a corner of the tract for an artists' community, but he never really wavered from a determination to keep River Oaks prestigious and racially pure.<sup>48</sup> He advised Mike Hogg, in the early days of the project, that "we believe we are financially able to build up this prestige by deliberately choosing and canvassing the desirable prospects for permanent residence." Certainly "desirable prospects" did not include Jews or non-whites. When the infamous "gentlemen's agreement" failed to guarantee the purity of River Oaks, the corporation relied on other tactics. One Jew who managed to buy a lot in River Oaks was continually hounded by requests to sell his property. When he finally sold, Hugh Potter wrote Will Hogg, "I understand for some peculiar reason, he has it in for Country Club Estates. Perhaps he resents our attitude. Anyway we have gotten rid of him."<sup>49</sup>

For the elite of the elite, Hogg proposed "a neighborly little group of distinguished homes." Within the confines of River Oaks, Hogg projected that one section be restricted to fifteen estates varying from 3.5 to 15 acres. Initial ownership would be "exclusively on invitation." The pastoral theme of the entire project was extended here as the homes were to be built around a small park on a single street, Lazy Lane, and called "Contentment." The Hogg's own Bayou Bend comprised part of this exclusive project as did the homes of several leading Houston families. Hogg called the project a real "wow" and predicted it would be the "most ambitious 90-acre secluded residential area that I know of in the South and as far as I know, damn few in the United States will compare with it."<sup>50</sup>

The security and permanence of the homes in both Contentment and River Oaks were guaranteed by a series of deed restrictions which promised what zoning accomplished elsewhere: permanent, homogeneous neighborhoods. Advertisements in local papers promised, "River Oaks Assures You Permanent Satisfaction, your future advantages are assured by protective restrictions and proper provisions for maintenance: restrictions that safeguard your home and even conserve your homesite value." Another solicitation announced, "Our restrictions and provisions for thorough maintenance are designed to guarantee owners attractive surroundings, to stabilize property values, and to insure wholesome living conditions."<sup>51</sup>

This same commitment to nature and planning characterized Hogg's plans for the entire west side of Houston. Hogg was convinced that residential Houston "would grow around and beyond River Oaks and be beautified by it."<sup>52</sup> To that end, Hogg hoped to bring many of the same benefits of planning

<sup>47</sup>Newspaper advertisement, n.d., Hogg Papers; Cook and Kaplan, "Civic Elites," p. 31; River Oaks Owners Manual (1926), River Oaks Collection, HMRC.

<sup>48</sup>Hogg thought the project, which was to be headed by Mrs. Grace Spaulding John, should include an exhibition hall for artists and would be "quite interesting," but he doubted their ability to finance the project. William C. Hogg to Hugh Potter, March 27, 1928, Hogg Papers.

<sup>49</sup>William C. Hogg to Mike Hogg, May 28, 1925; Hugh Potter to William C. Hogg, December 27, 1926, Hogg Papers.

<sup>50</sup>William C. Hogg to Hugh Prather, April 2, 1925, Hogg Papers.

<sup>51</sup>Newspaper advertisement, n.d., Hogg Papers.

<sup>52</sup>Our Story of River Oaks, p. 4.

that River Oaks demonstrated to the entire west end. Many of his proposals for uplift related to road repair, maintenance, and expansion, especially for streets that led through or to River Oaks. Hogg wrote Mayor Monteith that the three most important street improvement projects were West Gray, San Felipe and Westheimer road; all bordered on River Oaks.<sup>53</sup>

Hogg was not, however, merely concerned with securing adequate access and egress for River Oaks. His concern for maintaining and enhancing environmental integrity through city planning dominated his efforts on behalf of the west end. He worked to enable the city to purchase over 1,500 acres for the site of the city's largest municipal park. In November, 1923, Varner Real Estate Company (a Hogg corporation) bought 875 acres at a cost of \$176 per acre for future development. Later, Hogg and his partners became convinced the land would make an excellent park. They then purchased an additional 630 acres for \$600 per acre. Hogg Brothers then gave the city \$50,000 to make the first installment on the note they carried at their cost, although it was not over 40% of the market value of the land.<sup>54</sup>

Hogg also worked to secure other park land for the city. He bought several individual parcels of land along Buffalo Bayou and held them until the city could afford to purchase them from him at his cost. Hogg felt the property should be free of commercialism and demanded that the parkways along the bayou be kept as "pleasure and scenic-sight-seeing drives." To that end, he forced the bus company to abandon proposed service along the route and thwarted one attempt to locate a ball park in the area. Hogg also labored to beautify these parkways and other streets in the area by instructing his workmen to plant everything from azalea bushes to oak trees along the routes.<sup>55</sup>

To oversee the development of the west side, Hogg organized the West End Improvement Association and the Forum of Civics. Hogg considered the West End Improvement Association "an organization of all the owners of the undeveloped property on the West Side to bring about the careful planning and zoning of residential Houston as it takes its inevitable course westward under pressure of expanding commercial and industrial enterprise on the opposite side of the city."<sup>56</sup> Included in Hogg's goals for the organization were the banishment of free range for cattle and hogs, removal of signs and objectionable fences, and a concerted effort to get more hard surface roads. Beyond a simple clean-up, Hogg asserted that the "most important" part of his scheme was "to stamp that sector of the city as West-End—in other words to trade-mark it, so as to exploit it by advertising."<sup>57</sup> Hogg wanted a

<sup>53</sup>Hugh Potter to Walter E. Monteith, August 21, 1928; for an indication that Potter and Hogg were not always happy with the Mayor's response, see Hugh Potter to Walter E. Monteith, December 7, 1929, and December 12, 1929, Hogg Papers.

<sup>54</sup>Houston *Chronicle*, November 30, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup>William C. Hogg to H.A. Halverton, May 20, 1926; William Hogg to Norman Atkinson, December 6, 1927; H.E. Brigham to Oscar F. Holcombe, November 14, 1927; William C. Hogg to Donald Rein, May 15, 1929; William C. Hogg to H.E. Brigham, January 3, 1927; William C. Hogg to Mike Hogg, January 3, 1927; William C. Hogg to Mike Hogg, January 3, 1927, Hogg Papers.

<sup>56</sup>*Our Story of River Oaks*, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup>William C. Hogg to Hugh Potter, April 21, 1925; Notes for Barbecue Talk, April 2, 1925, Hogg Papers.

new high school in the area to be named West-End High School, and a change in the name of Westheimer Road to West-End Drive.<sup>58</sup> As headquarters for the West End Improvement Association, Hogg secured an abandoned school house on Westheimer Road; it would serve not only as a headquarters for the organization, but as a "storm-center for city planning, county planning and other civic forethought."<sup>59</sup>

In a small brochure announcing the formation of the Forum of Civics, Hogg outlined the plans and programs for this organization. He lamented the plethora of civic organizations, each with a "different handle," which led to "waste—or at least duplication—of effort." Efficient city planning and civic growth, he argued, required "coordinated effort." He envisioned the Forum of Civics as a "congress of representative organizations" concerned with the various physical, social, educational, and economic aspects of urban life. The organization would include representatives of municipal and county governments as well as private organizations. Although Hogg did not ask for the disbanding of any organization, he felt that the efficiency provided by consolidation would eventually eliminate some of the organizations. Hogg's plans for the Forum of Civics, therefore, included an auditorium capable of seating two hundred people to be used for meetings and speeches by professional planners. He also envisioned a library of reference materials related to urban planning. Local reports or plans deserving dissemination were to be published by the organization.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the Forum of Civics eventually published the *Report of the City Planning Commission of Houston* and distributed it to various agencies.

Throughout the Forum of Civics brochure, Hogg emphasized his basic desire "to make this city more enjoyable, more adequately equipped, more beautiful—and consequently more useful for everyone who lives and works herein." He described the Forum of Civics as a corporation designed "to stimulate and give impetus to plans and methods for the improvement in attractiveness and usefulness of public structure and private homes and their environment, and the planning and beautification of streets, highways, parks and play grounds." Hogg included both home beautification and advanced scientific urban planning under the general umbrella of planning for the Forum of Civics. Planning, in Hogg's mind, had to be a community-wide concept. The individual's concern for his home and street had to be incorporated with and used by the planner in his vision of the city and region as a whole. Hogg felt the individual Houstonian could be encouraged to feel an attachment to planning and a "realization that he owes an ethical and practical duty to the public and the community as a unit" by demonstrating its value on the microcosmic level of the home and street.<sup>61</sup>

Hogg also gave special attention to the financial structure of urban government. He feared that the traditional fiscal conservatism of the city

<sup>58</sup>William C. Hogg to Hugh Prather, May 2, 1925, Hogg Papers.

<sup>59</sup>William C. Hogg to Herbert Hare, May 30, 1929; William C. Hogg to Hugh Potter, May 6, 1925, Hogg Papers.

<sup>60</sup>William C. Hogg, "Forum of Civics," n.d., Hogg Papers.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

would prevent a full commitment to necessary reforms. Hogg asked Houstonians, "why demand more service of the municipal government . . . and not be willing to calculate the cost and deliberately, confidently, cheerfully, provide the funds?"<sup>62</sup> Hogg listed securing for Houston an adequate financial base and changing public attitudes in the whole area of municipal finances as main purposes of the Forum of Civics.

Despite his advanced ideas, Hogg's conservatism is apparent in his insistence that the Forum of Civics take a gradual approach with at least as much emphasis on home beautification as scientific planning. He readily acknowledged that his strength lay in working within the system, not by alienating it. In one letter, Hogg argued, "I do not see why we can't get practically every one interested in a city plan for Houston and include therein a great deal of interesting effort and accomplishment in the direction of home beautification, home gardening, tree and shrubbery planting, etc." Only after the Forum of Civics had "built up enough good will to give it some real standing in the community" through its commitment to home beautification could an effort be made in the "direction of municipal research and analysis."<sup>63</sup> On another occasion, Hogg wrote, "we don't expect to agitate and do it all in a day but we would like to hold before the public at the right time certain specific, practically attainable, attractive aims or objects of accomplishment."<sup>64</sup>

Hogg's aversion to dramatic forms of action is demonstrated in his relationship with Hester Scott, who served as head of the organization and editor of the Forum's journal, *Civics for Houston*. She continually complained of Hogg's attachment to glossy magazines and home beautification propaganda rather than to projects advancing the cause of urban planning.<sup>65</sup> In one long letter (after Hogg had dismissed her following several arguments), Scott claimed the magazine "cost too much—for that you are to blame." She also accused Hogg of limiting the scope and distribution of the magazine. Scott had other criticisms of Hogg: "When I suggested a program to get swimming pools for Houston, of which there is a pitiful lack, you told me to 'lay off' for the present. When I wanted to assist them in getting a civic theatre you told me to 'lay off.' When I first suggested organizing street or community improvement associations you said to 'go slow on account of limited budget.'" Generally, she complained, "Each thing that I suggested believing it would be good for the city and a definite thing we could do to show we were sincere, I received either this same answer or none at all." Finally, Scott charged, the organization was saddled with functions like distributing crepe myrtle bushes, a job she felt was better suited for garden clubs.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Rough Sketch for newspaper advertisement, Hogg Papers.

<sup>63</sup>William C. Hogg to James W. Routh, June 18, 1926, Hogg Papers.

<sup>64</sup>William C. Hogg to James W. Routh, December 12, 1926, Hogg Papers.

<sup>65</sup>Mrs. Scott complained of Hogg's denigrating attitude toward her because of her sex: "I've been doing what are spoken of as 'men's jobs' for the past ten years, and supporting a family while I did them—mand [sic] I get tired of having sex flung in my face. If God had given me half a chance I'd never been a woman anyway—but I am and so I have to make the best of it and try to do things that much better than a man would do them." Undated letter from Hester Scott to William C. Hogg. Also see, for examples of the continuing disagreement between the two, William C. Hogg to Hester Scott, March 14, 1928 and December 1, 1928, Hogg Papers.

<sup>66</sup>Hester Scott to William C. Hogg, December 11, 1928, Hogg Papers.

In fact, the crepe myrtle and other planting projects were extremely important to Will Hogg. Through the Forum of Civics, he gave away over 60,000 bushes; distribution was accomplished through the public school system, and Hogg made a major effort to see the plants distributed in both black and white sections of the city. Hogg, much to the displeasure of Scott, also demanded that *Civics for Houston* devote a large portion of its space to civic beauty and home beautification schemes. A planting chart on the care and planting of various shrubs and flowers was included in every issue. Articles in one issue included "The Private Garage" and "Old Chintz Patterns in Modern Homes." Other articles included "Porches and Porticos," "Bathrooms Assume a New Importance," and "Beauty in Doorways." Articles on gardening included one catchy piece, "Do You Know Your Bugs," and "The Practical Treatment of a Rose Garden."<sup>67</sup>

Despite this innate conservatism, Hogg's initial plans for inviting speakers to Houston and providing an urban library were achieved. Hogg asked Scott to bring in experts on "planning and zoning, paving and drainage, interracial problems, etc."<sup>68</sup> The August, 1923, issue of *Civics for Houston* contained the most comprehensive view of the city's black population many whites had ever seen. It was solicited from C.F. Richardson, editor of the black newspaper, the *Houston Informer*. Plans were laid and carried out for promoting zoning through outside speakers and a wide-ranging publicity campaign. Hogg even hoped to sponsor the production of a film. In a long note, Hogg proposed the motion picture, which would include one picture of a "fat and opulent landlord with a covetous look . . . just in order to have more human and less lumber and brick element in the story." The idea, Hogg announced, "is to bring out all the advantages we have in starting a city plan, but what we still need; then give what the city planning commission proposes (and why) in each case. This will require a great deal of thought, to get it short and pithy enough to hold the attention of a pleasure seeking audience."<sup>69</sup>

Hogg could never, however, shake his commitment to a conservative approach. After one year, he felt the organization and magazine had come to a crossroad. One possible route, as he saw it, was to "re-organize the Forum of Civics along the lines of a taxpayer's league for municipal research." Hogg apparently never gave this much consideration. Instead, he fired Scott and ordered the staff to follow a gradual approach. He advised the workers to "push" the Affiliated Garden Club organization, continue plant distribution, and get out a garden book and home book "including interior decoration."<sup>70</sup> While Hogg felt the organization might still publish sophisticated pieces on urban planning, he expressed more concern that the garden book and plant distribution projects be continued. It seems only natural that the school house that served as a headquarters for the Forum of Civics, and was intended to be a "storm center for city planning," now houses the River Oaks Garden Club, which continues many of the same kind of projects Hogg initiated.

<sup>67</sup>R.C. Shaffer to William C. Hogg, February 5, 1927, Hogg Papers. See issues of *Civics for Houston* for 1928 for these articles.

<sup>68</sup>William C. Hogg to Hester Scott, January 30, 1928, Hogg Papers.

<sup>69</sup>Notes on Movie Presentation of Houston City Plan, Hogg Papers.

<sup>70</sup>Notes for meeting, December 6, 1928, Hogg Papers.



Against the backdrop of Houston in the 1980s, there is much about Will Hogg's approach to improving his city which appears curiously naive. His stubborn insistence on dressing-up Houston with crepe myrtle bushes, more trees, and better gardens is a woefully inadequate solution to the problems of urban sprawl. Similarly, from what we now know of Houston's shoot-from-the-hip individualism, Hogg's belief that zoning was possible in the Bayou City seems unrealistic. It would be difficult indeed to imagine an orderly and efficient Houston in place of the cacophonous, though dynamic, community that is today's "City of Tomorrow."

In another sense, however, Will Hogg's contributions to his city are much more permanent. Whatever we may think of his faith in zoning and urban planning as a way to create a more beautiful Houston, it is an inescapable fact that he achieved those goals on a private level in River Oaks. It is equally true that what remains of the original civic center is also a lasting tribute to the dedication and influence of Will Hogg. It is no coincidence that both are among the handsomest and most enduring parts of the city. There are rivals to their beauty and planning, of course; parts of South Main Boulevard, the Shadyside subdivision, and Rice University are at least of equal design. But whether they were built by Hogg or others, these areas serve as dramatic reminders that, in Houston at least, the best in city planning and civic consciousness were the private contributions of a few and not the collective efforts of many.

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## PUBLIC ART AND PRIVATE PLACES: SHADYSIDE

BY STEPHEN FOX

The Houston subdivision of Shadyside is a 38 acre residential neighborhood located at the intersection of South Main Street and Montrose Boulevard. Set in the one portion of Houston planned according to the principles of the Civic Art Movement, Shadyside represents a paradox. Although developed in response to the standards of public planning set by Rice Institute and by the Houston Board of Park Commissioners at Hermann Park, Shadyside was envisioned—and has been maintained—as a preserve of single-family houses. As an examination of the correspondence of Joseph Stephen Cullinan, the oil operator responsible for creating Shadyside, reveals, he was intent on maintaining the integrity of this broad civic gesture in the development of the neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> This concern led him to retain George E. Kessler, the St. Louis landscape architect responsible for planning Houston's public park system, to lay out Shadyside and to advise on its development. It also led both Cullinan and a number of his friends and associates to support the establishment of other public institutions in the area to enhance its general character and maintain its exemplary quality.

The Civic Art Movement aimed to improve urban life through the intervention of rational planning methods and the systematic coordination of architecture and landscape design. In Houston it received its first, and most compelling, demonstration in the construction of a campus for the Rice Institute. Between the fall of 1908 and the spring of 1909, the trustees of the new university purchased 277 acres of land west of Main Street Road, 1½ miles south of the city limit. The Institute's president, Edgar Odell Lovett, commissioned the Boston architects Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson to prepare an ambitious general plan for the site and to design the initial buildings. When the Institute opened in September, 1912, it presented a stunning image of what planning and architecture could achieve in the service of a "progressive" civic consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The principal source of information for this essay has been the Joseph Stephen Cullinan correspondence collection, now deposited at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. For assistance with the preparation of the article, acknowledgement is due to the staff of the HMRC, the staff of the Texas and Local History Department of the Houston Public Library; the staff of the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University; to Jan Henry, stenographer; and especially to Howard Barnstone, David Courtwright, Alice Myrick Scardino, John F. Staub and Drexel Turner.

<sup>2</sup>See "The General Plan of the William M. Rice Institute and its Architectural Development, 1909-1941," (1978) to be published as monograph 29 in the *Architecture at Rice* series. Also Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets, *The American Vitruvius: An American Architect's Handbook of Civic Art* (New York, 1922), p. 125.