

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Preserving the Past (*If Possible*)



The groundbreaking for the new archival wing of the Julia Ideson Building was something to behold. On a picture perfect Houston spring day in January, several hundred people gathered to hear the speeches and watch the groundbreaking for the new wing. Mayor White spoke with enthusiasm about the impact of the preservation and expansion of the Ideson Building on future generations of Houstonians.

I left the ceremony convinced that he was not exaggerating. This was an important, perhaps even historic, moment for our city. This ambitious project has mobilized almost \$25 million in public and private funds to restore an important downtown building and to complete the original plans from the 1920s by adding space for an archive. It might well prove to be a turning point for historic preservation in Houston.

The mayor took the critical role of targeting this project as something that needed to be done. Then concerned citizens led by Phoebe Tudor organized the Julia Ideson Preservation Partnership to push the project forward. They enjoyed the support of key figures such as Rhea Brown Lawson, the Director of Libraries for the City of Houston, and of many others in the public and private sectors who closed ranks to get the job done.

In doing so, this group of citizens continued the long tradition of Houstonians who in the past have organized to help complete the Houston Ship Channel, to bring NASA to the Houston area, to build major universities in the city, to create the Texas Medical

Center, and to pursue other civic endeavors. This time, their efforts were in the interest of historic preservation, a quality of life issue whose time has come.

The articles on Julia Ideson and the preservation of the library building bearing her name celebrate this triumph. What a place the restored, refurbished, and expanded Ideson building will be. This issue also includes an article on a successful case of adaptive reuse, the transformation of the M&M Building into the main campus building for UH Downtown. It also has an article on one of the most notable failures in historic preservation in our city's history—the demolition of the Shamrock Hilton. As is often true, in this case failure triggered success; the unsuccessful efforts to save the Shamrock fostered the growth of a stronger preservationist movement in Houston.

(Old editor's cranky aside: I acknowledge that the Shamrock was historically significant. But I also spent the night there once, and I remember the room as one of the worst hotel rooms I have ever occupied, second only to a room in a bizarre run-down motel near the north entrance of Yellowstone where we lay awake half the night waiting for Anthony Perkins or his mom to burst through the door. Perhaps we should have preserved the Shamrock's amazing swimming pool and its lobby while demolishing the rooms.)

The excellent interview with Larry Gregory reminds us of the horrible damage from Hurricane Ike to much of Galveston, prodding us perhaps to dig a bit deeper with our time and our money to help repair the historic buildings of that city. My own piece on the near total destruction of Bolivar Peninsula is simply my way of grieving the destruction of a place that has been a significant part of my life. I'll admit that the article is self indulgent, but pamper me on this one, for it comes from the heart. The memories from Hilda Lopez of her beach house on Bolivar are, for me, touching beyond words.

Where Do We Go from Here?

The *Houston History* magazine is committed to publishing three issues each year, although the addition of the third issue has stretched thin our funding and our small staff. The editor, Joe Pratt, remains, but a detour in life has taken him temporarily to the job of "interim dean" of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS), the largest college on the UH campus. Expect more misspelled words and incomplete sentences and thoughts in his future letters from the editor. The new staff consists of Jamie Quiroga and Debbie Harwell, with assistance from Ernesto Valdes, the director of the Oral History of Houston. We have an enlarged and perhaps more active board headed by Bill Kellar, with new members Fred Korge, Jim Saye, Betty Chapman, and Penny Jones (for a complete list, see opposite page). While planning future issues, we also are building a

state-of-the-art web site with the cooperation of the Houston History Association.

We are also committed to the current format of the magazine. Designer Marsha Van Horn, who designed the original issues of the magazine, has returned. Future magazines will retain the length and look of the current issue. We will continue to have several feature articles (such as those on the Ideson building in this issue), followed by recurring departments with articles on historic preservation, culture (high and low), neighborhoods, museums, and interviews with interesting Houstonians. The next issue in July will feature articles on sports in Houston. The following issue in November will be on the history of what I still call the Houston Fat Stock Show. If you have ideas for these or future issues, let us know.