

during the early years of the depression.¹²⁵

The City Council in 1930 was not entirely unresponsive to the need for city planning. For example, on March 5, the Council approved a new and much-needed building code.¹²⁶ In the succeeding months, however, the Council was apparently unwilling to reconsider the issue of zoning. On April 8, North Side Planning and Civics adopted a resolution urging that City Council instruct the City Planning Commission to proceed with public hearings in the manner provided by law.¹²⁷ Nothing came of this request. Private planning efforts suffered a further setback when, on September 12, 1930, Will Hogg died while vacationing in Germany.

* * *

By 1930, Houston city planning lagged behind that of many other Texas cities. While no single factor can account for this phenomenon, one explanation lies in the city itself. Owing, in part, to its tremendous rate of growth since 1900—hardly diminished by the First World War—Houston had long fostered a climate conducive to a conservative, individualistic philosophy. Beliefs in self-reliance and in private action reigned supreme. Ironically, these beliefs found favor both with those opposing and with those advocating a greater role for city planning in Houston. Opponents perceived in city planning a threat to private property interests; advocates (such as Lyle, Tracy, Blayney, and Hogg) believed that participation by private citizens was indispensable to the creation and execution of a rational city plan. By 1930, the opponents had gained the upper hand, and the city plan was abandoned. Nevertheless, the decade of the 1920s left a significant legacy. Houston had a civic center. Subdivision regulations, updated from time to time, would continue to call for voluntary compliance by developers until the development ordinance of 1982 made the regulations official.¹²⁸ The major street plan of 1929 formed the basis of the city's first official street plan, which was approved in 1942.¹²⁹ In addition, politicians were reminded that local sentiment in favor of city planning was far from negligible. It was only a matter of time before zoning and city planning would again claim center stage in Houston politics.

¹²⁵Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 281. Despite severe budget reductions in the early 1930s, the planning commissions of most large cities managed to survive, at least in name. See Robert A. Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government* (Chicago, 1950), 37.

¹²⁶Houston, Texas, Ordinance No. 118, Houston City Council Minutes, March 5, 1930.

¹²⁷"Planning and Zoning Committee Reports," *The North Side of Houston* 3 (April 1930):18.

¹²⁸Houston, Texas, Code of Ordinances, Chapter 42 (1984).

¹²⁹See Peter C. Papademetriou, "Urban Development and Public Policy in the Progressive Era: 1890-1940," *Houston Review* 5 (no. 3, 1983):130-131; *Houston Chronicle*, October 4, 1942; "City Moves to Curb Bad Effects of Growth," *Houston Post*, March 24, 1985.

Visions for Houston: Booster Literature, 1886-1926

He's the glad-hander—the eternal optimist. He's proud of where he lives and, like the ad man with a catchy jingle, he wants to teach the world his tune. We call him the "booster," and perhaps we even smile a little at his unabashed belief in his city. But the civic booster is as American a character as the statesman or soldier we honor as a model of democracy in action. As America spread westward, the booster traveled along, a necessary man where the major national goal was growth and the prevailing emotion optimism. The booster provided the new, raw cities with a sense of identity as well as with advertisement through, as one historian explains, the use of metaphorical rhetoric which "projected continuity from the present into the future and spoke of dreams as reality."

As the new cities grew and became more sophisticated, so did boosterism. The civic boosters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were leading citizens who banded together to "sell" their city to those who could make it even more prosperous, especially to capitalists looking for investment or expansion. One method of attracting interest in a city was through the publication of promotional or "booster" booklets, and the Houston Public Library holds examples of several varieties designed to regale readers with the advantages waiting for them in the Bayou City.

This promotional literature has one purpose—the selling of Houston. The booklets are charming artifacts which we are inclined to laugh at today. But they should not be simply dismissed as unreliable tall tales, for they are historical records that offer an invaluable insight for the scholar. They provide factual written and visual data about Houston during a crucial era of American urban and industrial growth. And, perhaps more important, they tell us what Houston thought about itself—what its citizens felt were its strong points as a city and in what direction they wanted the city to develop.

Characteristics of "Boosterana"

The Houston Public Library has over two dozen pieces, dating from the late 1880s through the mid-1920s, including pamphlets, souvenir booklets, picture albums, and flyers. Many contain extensive engravings, lithographs, and, later, photographs. Most are in a magazine format with text interspersed with art work, but some feature either text or visuals exclusively. They range in size from miniature picture books to journal size, and many are double quarto in width, styled like the photo albums kept on parlor tables to invite

browsers. The covers are generally paper, illustrated or engraved with eye-catching and often beautiful designs. The use of heavy paper covers instead of bindings seems to indicate that these were not necessarily meant to be permanent documents, or perhaps that they were often mailed or distributed in large quantities and therefore were inexpensively produced. Quality in production varies, with the most care generally given to those works which were entirely pictorial.

The text of these booster publications, while often relying heavily on statistics regarding population, size, temperature, and other easily quantifiable data, invariably includes an abundance of superlative and laudatory phrases as substitutes for more detailed descriptions or explanations. In 1893 one booster author described Houston as the "most prosperous and beautiful city in Texas, the greatest Railroad center of the State—if not the South—the largest interior cotton market and the second in point of receipts in the world, a manufacturing place of ever-increasing importance, the home of a refined, hospitable and progressive people." By 1900, "Houston's geographical position, unparalleled natural advantages and matchless resources" had made it "THE IMPERIAL CITY" of Texas. In 1901, "Houston, with careful mien, but fearless front measures her strength with the mightiest municipalities of the Great Southwest." Her climate was called "salubrious and healthful;" she had "more home-owning citizens than any other city in the Southwest," and was full of "wide awake, progressive business men." With this boastful rhetoric, the authors hoped to present Houston as an area offering the best in natural and manmade advantages.

The earlier texts wax eloquent on the future, citing statistics that play up the dramatic rates of growth in the city's population, housing, and number of business ventures. Some are on the defensive with regard to their image of Houston as a boom town, however: "If a city has sprung up like a mushroom in consequence of dishonest booming with nothing to back it, the wide-awake and the far-seeing will have nothing to do with [it] . . . That the growth of Houston, though remarkable, is healthy can be readily seen by a careful perusal of the following statistics furnished by the Cotton Exchange," says an 1897 booklet. It goes on to list population, gross cotton receipts, and miles of sewer pipes, among other proofs.

One of the most distinguishing marks of this type of publication is its use of slogans, and in this fifty-year spread we are treated to several attempts to fix upon Houston the one line that would "say it all." In 1891, "after the fashion of its public men and press," Houston was the "Hub City" for its railroads; the "Bayou City" for its location near navigable water; and the "City of Magnolias . . . for its charming environment of florissant sylva and perennial phases of bloom." For the Columbian Exposition of 1893 Houston became "the Chicago of the South," implying a resemblance to that city's tremendous

industrial and railroad growth. In 1900 it was the "Iron Ribbed City" for its large number of railroad tracks, while in 1905 the *Houston Chronicle* referred to it as the "Queen City of the Southwest." In the 1910s, while it was sometimes called "the Manchester of America" for its cotton market and inland port location, Houston had received the title that was to become her trademark: "Where 17 Railroads Meet the Sea." This slogan was used in booster books and on maps for many years.

Attracting the Crowd

Much of the text in these booster materials centers on the city's natural or manmade advantages for investment and the major business and agricultural pursuits which formed Houston's economic core. Most of the booklets were designed to thrust Houston into the consciousness of investors and industrialists—those capitalists, usually Northern, with the vision to see Houston as the right spot for their money. Obvious indications are the use of the word "industry" in the titles and the inclusion of extensive biographies of local businesses, ranging from small retail establishments to the city's major manufacturing concerns. It is unclear if these laudatory company histories, some a third of a page to a page in length, with data on how the business had grown or how essential it was to the community, were actually paid advertisements. These listings not only proclaimed the city's growth through the number and diversity of business, but also provided the interested investor with some idea of where his particular concern or dollars might fit in. Some publications offer specific suggestions as to what kinds of industries or businesses the authors felt were needed and would thrive in Houston.

Of course, these publications give no hint of political or social turmoil or of any "elements" of the populace that might be a cause for alarm to the conservative business or investment audience. Luring northern monies meant suppressing such issues as racial unrest and playing up the abundance of raw materials and cheap, malleable white labor. A 1923 Chamber of Commerce booklet, on the heels of the "Red Scare" at the end of World War I, informs the industrial capitalist that the labor force in Houston is 100 percent American and has ideals "free from the blight of foreign radicalism."

Some of the publications, featuring a "softer" sell, were designed for visitors to the city or for Houstonians themselves. These books often have little or no text, but many photos of major landmarks or scenic areas. Two of the pieces were fund-raising ventures for local civic organizations. *A Glimpse of Heavenly Houston* (1914), aimed at the convention trade, is an especially good example of a booster text that attempts to play up the city's hospitality and homeliness along with its "throbbing commercial, industrial, financial and agricultural" activities. The city is "never too busy to tender a warm welcome to the stranger;" the place "soon to become the dominant metropolis"

in the Southwest “throws down the gauntlet when it comes to questions of prosaic business, but commercialism is put aside when the guest arrives.” Unlike many of the materials that only use pictures of civic or business buildings, this booklet contains an appealing mixture of Houston’s business and residential world. Since the motive of all booster books is to present Houston at its best, it is probable that many of them served both as souvenirs and as sales tools for possible investors.

By Land and By Sea

Civic promotion was of necessity based on specific advantages the city could offer potential investors. Houston’s boosters concentrated their statistics and rhetoric on the city’s location and transportation aspects, with the economic activities which these basic advantages made possible. This was a widespread approach; historian Daniel Boorstin, in *The Americans: The National Experience*, notes that the “upstart” western cities of the nineteenth century depended upon transportation “in a new way” that their older counterparts had not. Transportation was their “lifeblood” because “the primary community service was to make it easier, cheaper, and pleasanter for people to join your community.” And for cities to grow and be prosperous, good transportation meant one thing: railroads.

One of Houston’s most important advantages was the proliferation of railroad lines that made it “the Railroad City of Texas.” The extensive railroad network and the establishment of railroad headquarters and shops in Houston made the rails a major point in city boosterism throughout this fifty-year period. *Houston Illustrated: A Few Facts About the South’s Most Prosperous City* (1893) lauds the glorious impact of the railroads: nothing was as important in the phenomenal development, prosperity, and advancement of all realms as the railroad, “having accomplished more on this Western Continent in the way of advancement toward what we are pleased to call civilization than any other one factor.” And a 1901 souvenir book claims that the “geographical location of Houston has been mainly responsible for the wonderful progress the city has made as a railroad center during the last 20 years.”

Railroads were not Houston’s sole transportation advantage, however, and the crucial link was never better stated than in the slogan “Where 17 Railroads Meet the Sea.” In 1891 “the completion of a channel from the entrance to Galveston Bay to [Houston’s] lower city line . . . A GULF PORT FOR ALL THE GREAT WEST” was touted as being of major importance in the “enlargement” and “enrichment” of the city. Although the railroads were the main enticement to attract people and investment capital to Houston, the Ship Channel and Houston’s status as an “inland port” soon became the center of much of the promotional literature. Houston’s superiority over rival

Galveston is carefully but unmistakably alluded to: in 1887 Houston was the center for jobbing business because of its “advantage of being situated on high ground and entirely free from danger from any possible high waters from the Gulf,” a claim which foreshadowed the 1900 hurricane that would seal Galveston’s doom as a port. Other booklets compare the freight rates to the interior from Houston with those from Galveston, and in selling the Ship Channel Houston boosters comment on the savings for shippers who use its land-sea connection. Subsequent materials continue to devote much space to the Ship Channel, and in 1920 a flyer produced by the Young Men’s Business League proclaimed the ship channel to be first of all the city’s achievements. It had done \$85 million worth of business in imports and exports in 1919, its capacity for manufacturing enterprises was capitalized at \$600 million, and it had 6,000 employees. In 1924, the *Booster Guide Book* called the Channel a “miracle” and bragged that Dallas and Fort Worth were jealous of it—Dallas could build cotton mills but it still had to send the cotton to Houston to be shipped.

A Booming Place for Business . . .

While the railroads and ship channel gave Houston’s boosters their chief advantage, it is also clear from their material that King Cotton was the city’s chief product. The 1886 pamphlet produced by the Houston Cotton Exchange and Board of Trade noted the cotton industry’s diversification and the number of gins, compresses, and warehouses as important to the city’s future growth. The cotton business made Houston “the Manchester of America,” and, by 1901, “the inland cotton market of the world.” The many photographs of ships and goods on the channel feature the extensive cotton trade.

The surrounding area’s rich agricultural resources, encompassing cotton, lumber, and other crops such as citrus fruits, rice, sugar beets, and figs, made Houston an agricultural market and commercial trading center for the region. A brochure aimed at a Chicago agricultural fair in 1912 named Houston the “winter truck growing region of America.” The early booster materials lean heavily on Houston’s agricultural and trading connection, often featuring photographs of the imposing City Market and descriptions of the myriad agricultural products grown in the surrounding “trade” area. And while boosters after 1901 recognize oil as a resource for a new boom for Houston, the focus on trading remains. Houston is described as “the recognized center of all that relates to the handling, refining and exporting of the Texas oil fields.”

Twentieth-century materials still give space to Houston as a commercial and trade center, but they place increasing importance on the city’s industrial growth. Not until the 1920s, however, does industry move ahead of agricultural production. In a 1923 publication, the Chamber of Commerce ingeniously claims that Houston’s comparative newness in developing heavy

industry is a benefit, since it "avoids the competition of more congested localities and the very large area of available industrial sites assures the obtainment of sites at a cost in marked contrast to that in effect in long established industrial centers."

A solid financial foundation was a prerequisite for any locality seeking major investment, and, accordingly, the boosters used much ink assuring the reader of the quantity and quality of the city's financial institutions. Often the books contain brief histories and capitalization records of the banks and savings and loans, much as they do for the railroads. Pictures of the solid-looking buildings built by these institutions were sure to add confidence to the presentation, as much as the pictures of the solid-looking men who ran them included in one publication.

... And No Better Place to Live

Houston boosters did not spend all their effort on business, however. Because Southern cities were often perceived to be substandard in such aspects as health and education, every attempt was made to convince the possible investor, resident, or visitor that Houston's public welfare and quality of life were up to Northern standards. In this effort, the publications reflect the concerns of their specific eras. An 1886 brochure alludes to the "opinions from hearsay about the conditions of society in Texas," noting that strangers often found "a pleasant surprise" upon assaying the "social, educational, and religious features of our population." In 1891 a series publication lauds Houston's mansions, architecture, schools, and modern public projects as "[m]aking therewith considerable show already of metropolitan dignity and state." An 1893 text published by the *Houston Daily Herald* spends much of its hundred pages on the transportation, commerce, and wholesale advantages, but gives plenty of space to the quality of life. It highlights the city's beauty, purity of air and water, effective city government, educational establishments, health care, and recreation, and includes a section on the city's first streetcar suburb, the Houston Heights. The boosters paid much attention to assuaging fears about epidemics: an 1894 book asserts that the two most "prevalent illnesses" are "teething and old age."

Early twentieth-century boosters made much of Houston's new, abundant fresh water supply (through a system of artesian wells) and its new sewer system. As city services such as street cars, paved streets, and utilities grew, booklets featured pictures of their installations in order to showcase Houston's modernity and advertise the availability of good industrial sites near cheap power and water. Efficient government being another mark of a progressive environment, many books describe the makeup of the city administration and point with pride to the police and fire departments. Good educational opportunities were also a major selling point, and photographs of the

massively endowed Rice Institute were used to impress readers. The church is always included in such materials through photographs of the solid, steepled edifices of the major denominations. Residences are also featured, especially the large and impressive homes of prominent citizens and occasional views of graceful, tree-lined streets. A few publications show homes and neighborhoods of the middle class as well, demonstrating how they "voice the confidence the people have in their city." Some materials, especially those aimed at visitors, spend much time on the lighter side of Houston life, with photos of pretty girls, idyllic park outings, happy fishermen, and lovely scenery. The boosters had an image of their city to appeal to anyone, images including every possibility from "the Manchester of America" to "the Magnolia City."

* * *

Although the boosters' enthusiasm led them to paint an incomplete portrait of the city, ignoring many aspects and optimistically inflating others, this literature born of hoopla and hype is a valuable resource for the scholar. One obvious use lies in the reams of statistics about the city, especially regarding the major industries, banks, railroads, the port and ship channel, and the central business district. Statistics often differ from one book to the next, but can easily be confirmed with outside data. A second important use lies in the quantities of photographs which illustrate this literature. They are generally the best and often the only surviving visual evidence of the important landmarks of Houston's past. These photographs must not be thought of as objective, however, since the boosters were selecting the images they wanted the potential investor or the casual visitor to remember. And those images are of a strong, solid, and lasting place—no boom city grown up overnight, teetering on the next economic whim. Houston had come to stay, and it meant business. The pictures show a community not overwhelmed by its history like so many other Southern cities, nor a place where one came just to have a good time. Reinforcing the narrative which accompanies them, their intent is to portray an urban area that knew what America admired: "progressive" success in business.

In fact, the most important use for this material comes from its biases. The boosters who produced the literature were community leaders. Individual authorship is usually unknown, but the organizations publishing these booklets, such as the Houston Chamber of Commerce and its predecessor, the Houston Business League, or the large daily newspapers, were the community elite and the opinion-makers of the city. Booster literature can thus be seen as a reliable source of what the decision makers of Houston thought about themselves and their city during the period when urban America was coming into its own. Although the materials show changes and trends, they

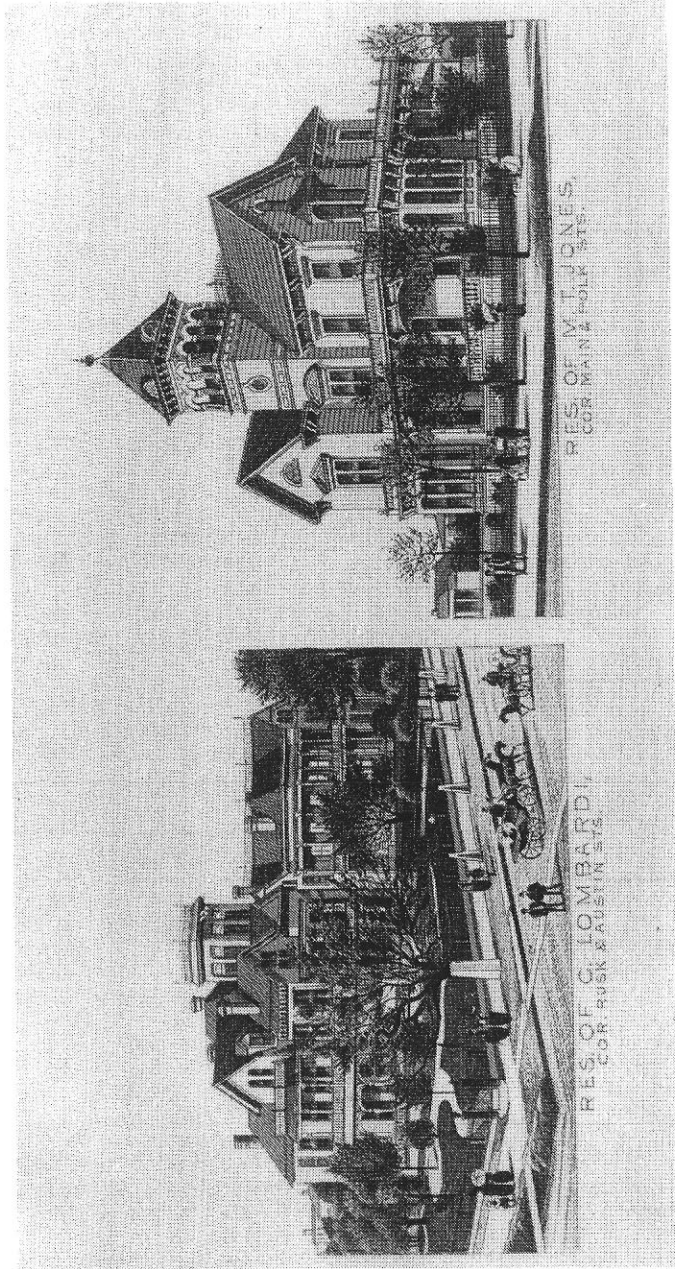
have a striking similarity of emphasis.

Stripping away the overblown language and looking past the perfectly polished pictures, one finds a city determined to use its geographic advantages in order to grow. Houston was not content being the commercial center of the region. It actively sought the ingredients it needed to transform itself into a major metropolitan area: immigrants, capital, and, most of all, industrial development. Withal, it was not foolish enough to forget that it was still a Southern town replete with a warm climate and a charming style of life. The sweet fragrance of the magnolia could be as enticing as the clanking wheels upon the rails or the acrid smell of smokestacks. Booming yet blooming, Houston according to the booster had no minorities, no urban blight, no recessions. It saw itself as a Southern city where refinement was inbred, but with a Northern temperament that thrived on competition. And, while great care must be taken to decipher the true facts from the selected data chosen by the writers and editors of such material, there is much that can be learned about the character of a city from seeing where its boosters in the civic elite thought that city's future lay. In their search to simultaneously portray and create the right kind of urban paradise, the city's boosters truly do offer us the dream of a "Heavenly Houston." We are left with the literature and the legacy of their dream—to decide whether, and how, that dream came true.

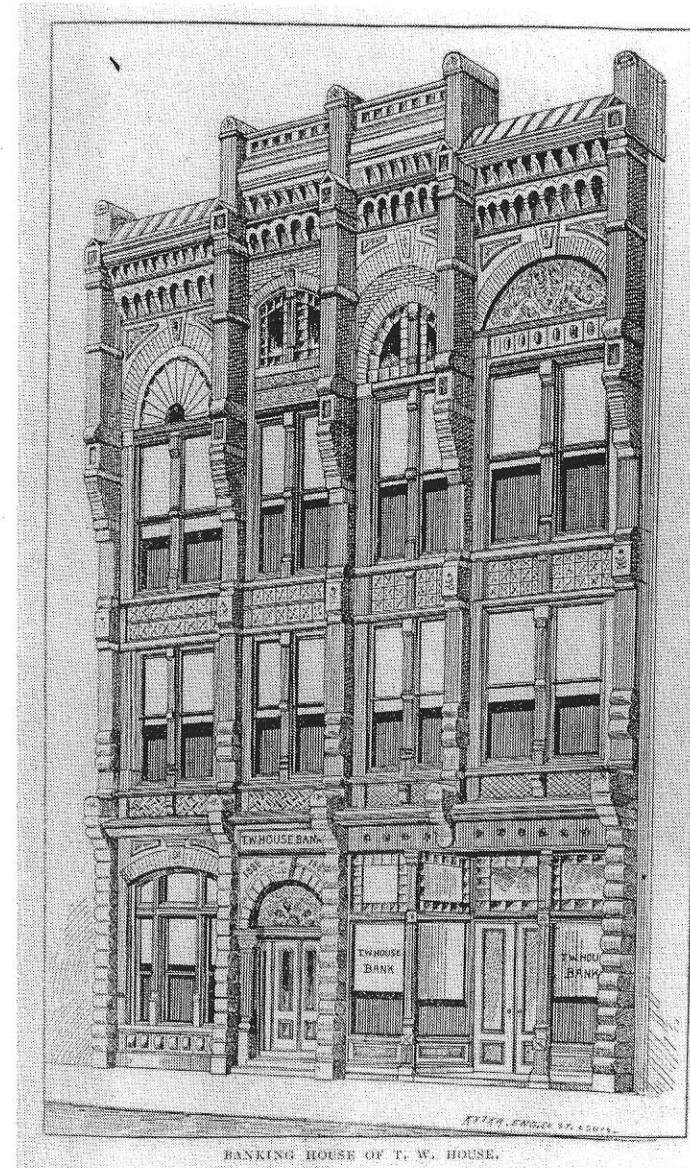
Frances Dressman
Editorial Assistant



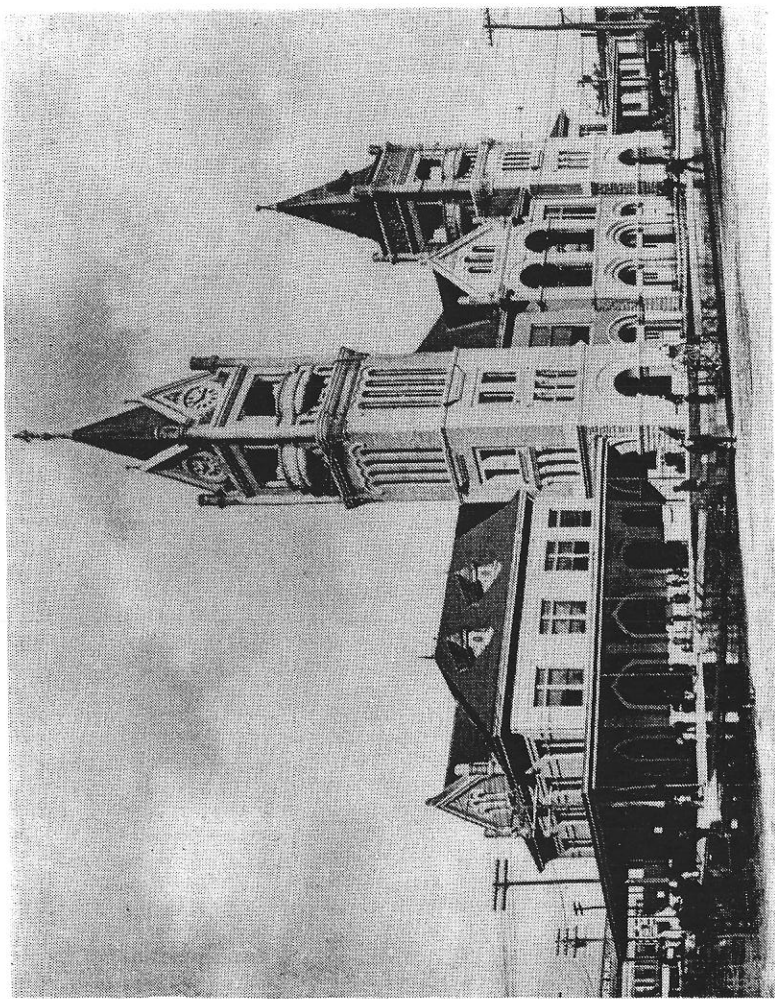
The elaborate cover of this 1897 booklet presents a gracious and cultured image of the Magnolia City through views of the city park and library.



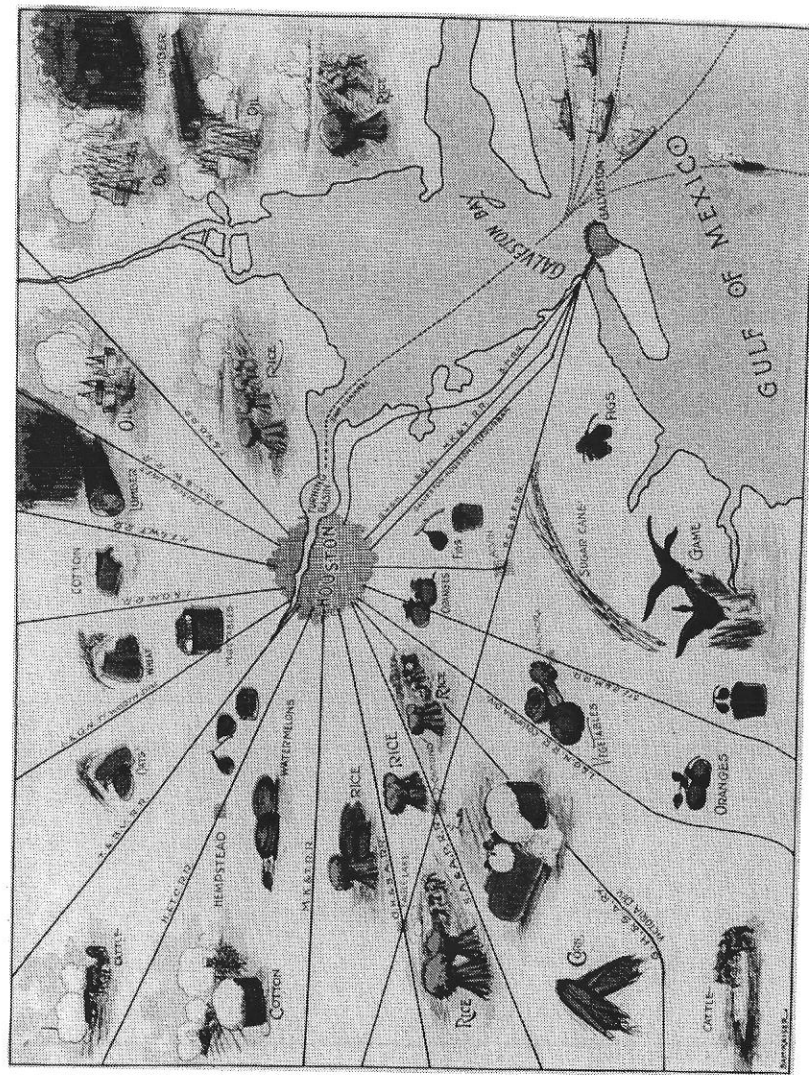
The *Souvenir Album of Houston, Texas* (1891) contains toned lithographs of street scenes, important businesses, churches, and substantial residences such as those shown here.



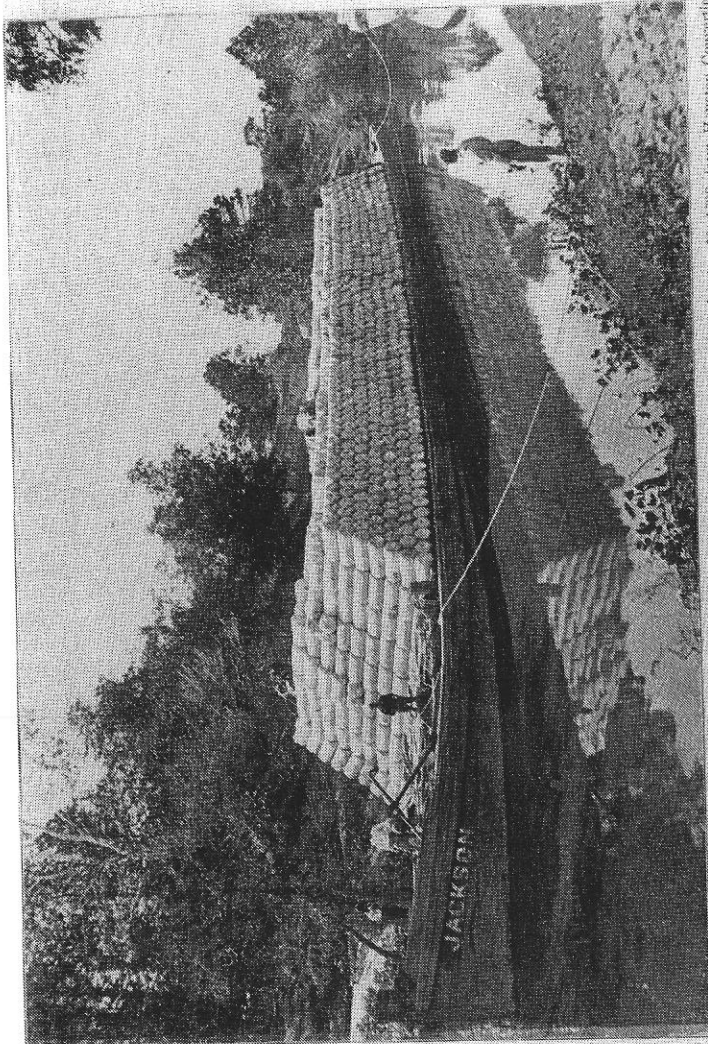
The *City of Houston*, also from 1891, concentrates on long biographies of the city's most prominent businesses and their owners. The section on the T. W. House Bank is ornamented with this engraving of the bank's handsome facade.



The City Market symbolized both Houston's impressive municipal buildings and its agribusiness economy. This illustration is from the 1897 *Souvenir of Houston, Texas* whose cover is pictured on page 145.



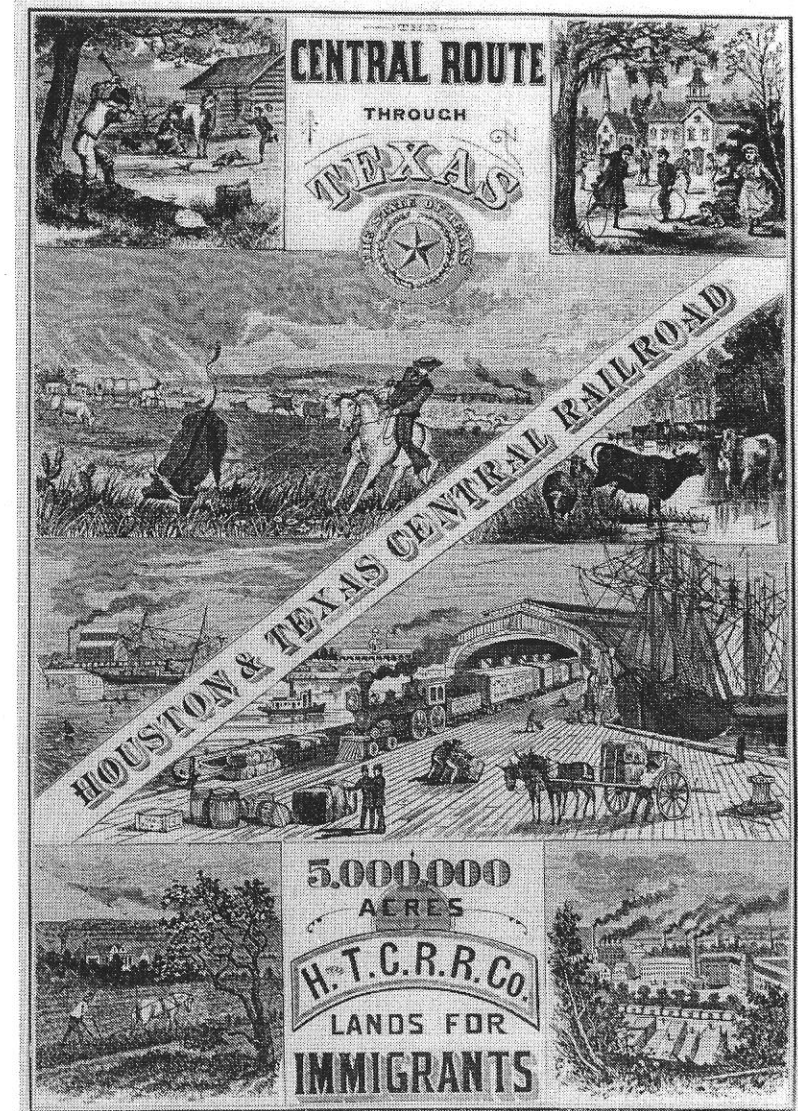
In 1914, the book *Houston, Texas, the Most Progressive City of the South* used this map to indicate the variety of products and extent of the region served by Houston's rail-sea connections.



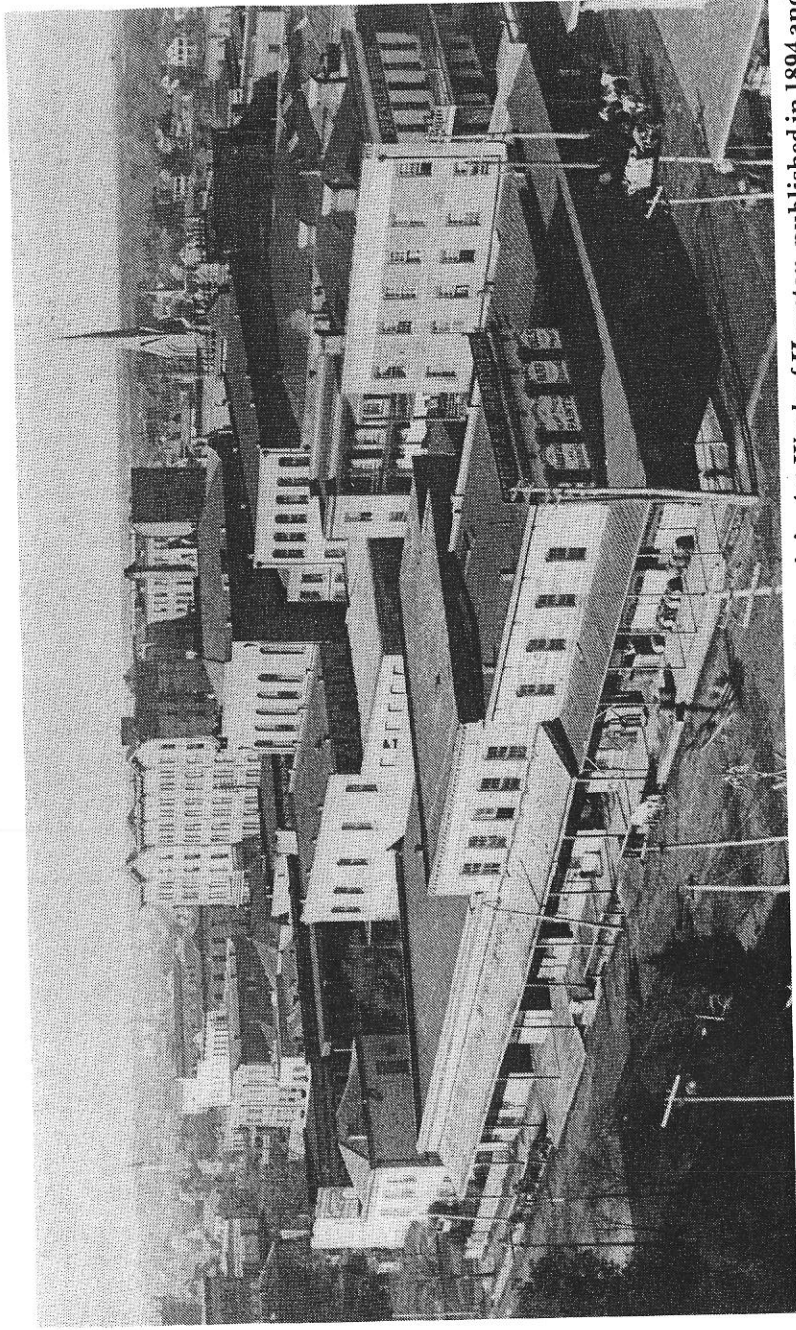
Largest Cargo.

This is a scene on Buffalo Bayou. The barge was loaded October 30, 1898, from Houston, Converting Plant, with 5,500 Lower bales of cotton, weighing 1,285,861 pounds. Loaded on Steamship, Catania, in Boliver Roads, for Boston, and not touching Garretts wharves. Capacity of barge, 650 tons. This is the largest cargo of cotton ever loaded on Buffalo Bayou. See steamship, page 11.

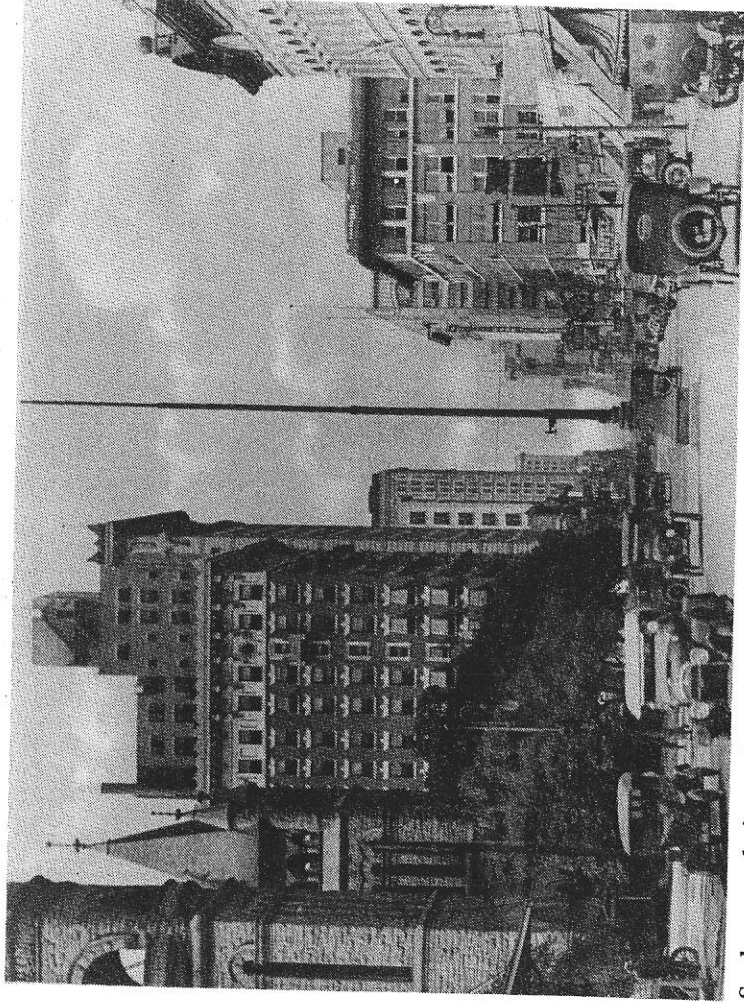
Booster publications often showed "typical scenes" of ships, boats, or barges on the Bayou or Ship Channel. Many of the pictures featured King Cotton, though few are as striking as this photograph from a 1900 book.



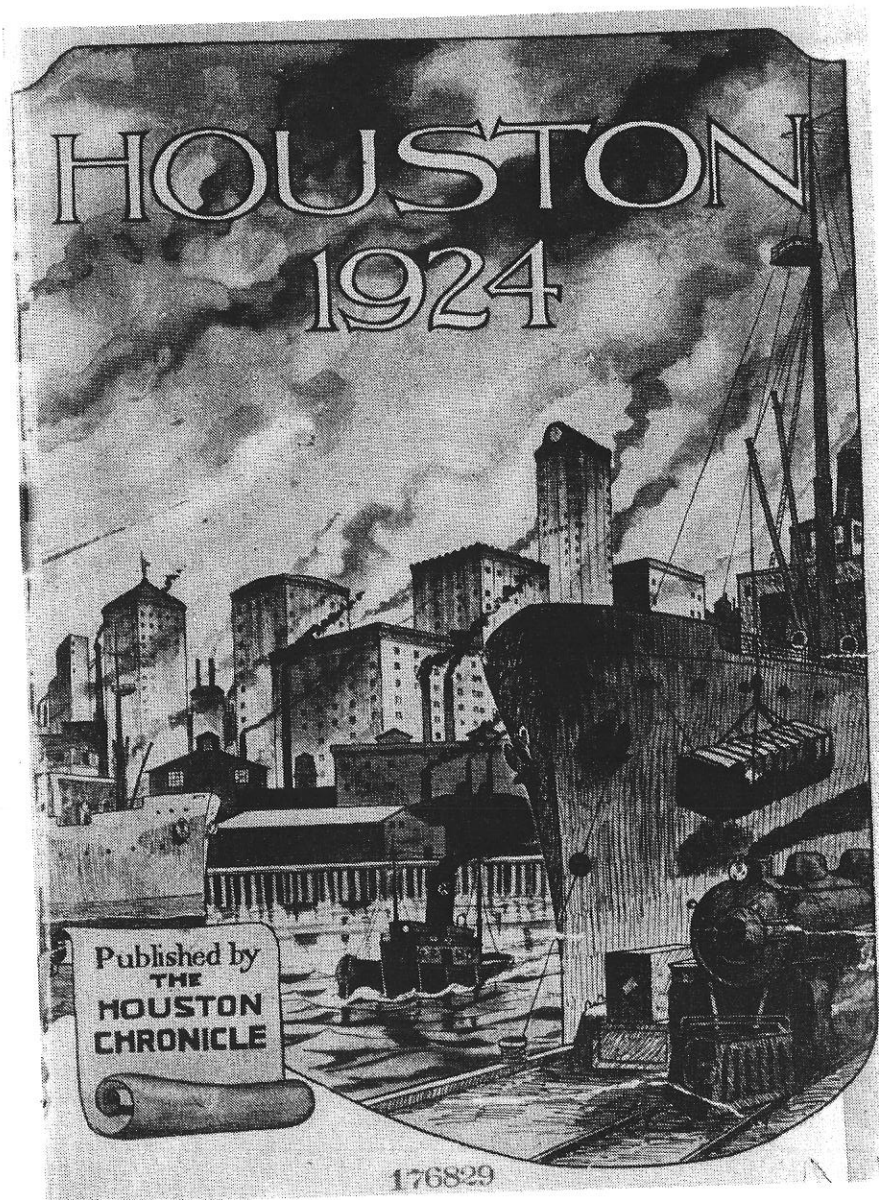
The same book, *Houston, Texas, the Progressive City of the Empire State*, contains several full-page advertisements by railroad lines. Aimed at prospective immigrants, this one incorporates a broad range of Texas imagery.



Perhaps the most comprehensive and informative set of pictures is in *Art Work of Houston*, published in 1894 and again in 1904. The two hundred photographs in these two books include all types of buildings, as well as industrial, agricultural, and street scenes. This overview of the business district is from the 1894 volume.



Such general views of the city can be an important historical resource, showing both the detail and the scale of the city. *Houston, Texas: Where 17 Railroads Meet the Sea*, a 1922 publication, is especially rich in bustling downtown street scenes such as this one looking north on Main Street.



Skyscrapers, factories, ships, and railroads—this 1924 booklet cover sums up the booster businessman's vision of a truly progressive city.

Book Review

Allen's Landing: The Authentic Story of the Founding of Houston. Ralph E. Dittman. (Houston: A. C. and J. K. All Publishing, 1986. Pp. 776, incl. index.)

Ralph E. Dittman is a medical doctor whose great-great-grandfather was the brother of Augustus C. and John Kirby Allen, the founders of Houston. Dittman's great-great-grandfather's kinsman explains the purpose of the book in the Foreword: "Written as a novel, [it] . . . is a story steeped in primary historical fact . . . written to be enjoyed." The book covers the period from March 1832 until the end of August 1836, from the brothers' move to Nacogdoches, Texas, until the decision to create a new town named Houston on Buffalo Bayou. A brief epilogue summarizes the lives of A. C., his wife Charlotte, and J. K. Allen from 1836 to their respective deaths, along with an account of the activities of other Texans whom they knew. The author plans two more volumes to complete the Allen history.

The historical characters who move through the story discourse at length about events past and present, offer biographical information about an amazing number of persons, and expound an astounding array of facts concerning everything from yellow fever to toilet facilities. Sometimes the interchanges are breezy and informative, but often the speaker sounds like an encyclopedia or a history professor reciting from old notes. In the course of the book Dittman provides historical background about such larger topics as New York City; the development of the Erie Canal; the Jacksonian era to 1832; the Texas legend of Mariade Agreda, the Woman in Blue, whose spirit traveled from Spain to visit the Jumano Indians between 1620 and 1631; the conflict between the Spanish and the natives of central Mexico; the mission system in eastern Texas from 1691; the founding of Nacogdoches in 1779; the Mexican Independence movement between 1810 and 1821; and the problems of Anglo-American settlement in Texas through 1836. In short, the book is a complete history of Texas and of the period told through conversation.

While the author has done an incredible amount of research from New York to Texas about history, geography, and how people lived, the fictional, unfootnoted character of the narrative leaves the reader wondering just what is fact and what is imaginative writing. Exactly which family papers have been used is not clear, although the foreword mentions "crumbling letters and hidden diaries," plus oral tradition. It is obvious that Dittman dug into