Southeast Houston: From Pastures to South Park to MLK
In the 1970s some Houstonians greeted integration’s promise of greater access to educational equality with enthusiasm. This reaction was in part because integration also meant improved employment and housing opportunities for African Americans, Latinos, and women. As better-equipped schools, higher paying jobs, and housing became available, Third Ward’s boundaries expanded east, west, and south. Some call this larger area Southeast Houston, others claim it as the Greater Third Ward, and still others declare the Third Ward’s boundaries to be wherever you see colored people. Today this ever-growing land base has over 22,000 ethnically diverse residents, nine active civic clubs, and multiple community names like Old Spanish Trail / South Union, Palm Center, Super Neighborhood 68, South Park, Scott Terrace, Foster Place, MacGregor Trails, and Riverside Terrace.

Some say this area stretches south from Wheeler Street bordering Texas Southern University and the University of Houston, east to Spur 5, west to Highway 288, and south to Loop 610. The borders overlap, spreading south into Sunnyside, a semi-rural African American community; west to the ever-expanding Medical Center; and east into Wayside. Today, Latino families, the newest arrivals, are displacing the now aging African Americans who settled into the area’s modest homes with spacious yards left behind by whites fleeing integration.

The University of Houston’s Center for Public History, which includes the Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative, has a long-term commitment to local studies. For almost thirty-five years, Houston History and its predecessor the Houston Review of History and Culture of the Gulf Coast have published articles that reveal the impact of urbanization, with its constant shifting of living patterns over time.

The articles in this issue illustrate the process of change over 175 years from the 1840s to the present. The revealing stories about Palm Center, the Kuhlmann Family, Kuhlman Gully, MacGregor Park and its Homer T. Ford Tennis Center, prominent minister Overseer R. L. Braziel, and METRO’s Purple Line opening reflect the ethnic footprints left to us by the area’s residents. These articles also illustrate the many ways that the different ethnic groups have searched for home, place, and community.

These stories enable us to understand on a personal level how race, income, and geography have shaped neighborhoods. We have also posted additional articles on the website that deepen our understanding of what is happening in Houston’s underserved communities today. The mix of personal and local histories within the context of academic research and community activism help us comprehend how gentrification and demographic inversion have happened in the past and are still happening in Houston through massive residential and commercial construction and community displacement.

Houston History now publishes two printed issues and one digital issue each year. The digital format provides expanded content through online articles, videos, photographs, and streamed and transcribed interviews. Please visit www.houstonhistorymagazine.org and enter the subscriber password to take advantage of this additional material.

As guest editor of this issue, I gained much knowledge from Houston History’s back issues, which provided valuable insights into how we can use our changing views of home, community, and place to help facilitate Houston’s ongoing metamorphosis into a twenty-first-century global city. The Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative is a storehouse of knowledge about our region and its past. Through the articles in Houston History and the oral histories and archives from which these articles were written, I have gained a better appreciation of public history’s role within history’s academic traditions and hope to share these findings with you, our readers.

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Southeast Houston:
From Pastures to South Park to MLK

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COVER PHOTO: Palms Center, shown here in 1967, offered shoppers national department stores, local retailers, and a grocery store for one-stop shopping. Photo ©The Houston Chronicle. Used with permission.

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The original Palms Center sign as it appeared in 1965 served as a beacon to shoppers in Southeast Houston. The mall was home to Walgreens and J.C. Penney’s, as well as popular local favorites Oshman’s Sporting Goods and Walter Pye’s, among others.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos © The Houston Chronicle. Used with permission.
With the recent addition of the Southeast line to the METRORail network, Southeast Houston is geared for revitalizing changes. The new line extends from downtown to Palm Center,* a former shopping center located at the intersection of Griggs Road and Martin Luther King Boulevard. Created to meet the needs of middle-class white suburbanites, Palm Center has adapted to the racial and economic transformations of the surrounding neighborhoods over a span of sixty years, and today it serves a very different purpose than it did in the past. Understanding the history of Palm Center is vital to understanding the struggle to combat community deterioration and the importance of revitalization in Southeast Houston.

Houston expanded rapidly in the post-World War II economic boom. The Houston Ship Channel invited economic growth in the form of new refineries, petrochemical plants, and other industrial businesses. In 1949, the Houston area encompassed roughly 160 square miles; and from 1950 to 1960, Houston’s population grew from approximately 596,000 to just over 938,000.1 As more and more land was annexed to accommodate outward growth, many Houstonians moved into newly constructed neighborhoods outside of the city center. Following the influx of wealth along Brays Bayou, white middle-class neighborhoods developed in the areas south of Texas Southern University (TSU) and the University of Houston (UH) and several blocks past Griggs Road and 610 South Loop. Some of these neighborhoods, including MacGregor Terrace,

* The name changed from Palms Center to Palm Center in 1993. This article uses the correct name for the time period discussed.
MacGregor Palms, MacGregor Place, MacGregor Park Estates, Southern Village, Grand Park, and South Park, were developed either before or shortly after Palms Center opened. Developers had set their eyes on Southeast Houston in response to this outward expansion of middle-class white Houstonians. Former mayor Oscar Holcombe and developer Sterling T. Hogan saw a potential for profit in the area and envisioned a shopping center that would service the needs of the many new white residents of Southeast Houston who lived far from downtown stores. According to Hogan, they chose the location at Griggs and South Park Boulevard (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) based on market surveys that predicted continued growth for the area at a rate unmatched by any other area in Houston.

In 1954 Holcombe and Hogan appointed the architecture firm of Irving R. Klein & Associates to design and build Palms Center. Klein, who had opened his Houston practice in 1935 and was known for his work on retail spaces and offices around the city, worked together with design and project architects Stanley Krenek and James Bishop. The structural framework for the center, completed by the Fisher Construction Company of Houston, followed Bishop and Krenek’s plans for a conventional open-air shopping center with “typical retail spacing of about 25 feet center to center.” Gulfgate shopping center, located along the Gulf Freeway at Woodridge and what is now 610 South Loop, was also under construction at this time and work on it had actually begun prior to Palms Center.

Despite its later start, Palms Center opened a year before Gulfgate, and in the weeks preceding its opening, the vibrancy community surrounding Palms Center. With a Lewis & Coker supermarket, a nearby Montgomery Ward department store, Oshman’s Sporting Goods, Walter Pye’s clothing store, J.C. Penney’s department store, Woolworth’s discount store, the Alice McKean Young Library, and many more establishments, Palms Center served as the focal point of the community. Houstonians could truly find everything they needed in just one stop, with no need to travel downtown or to Gulfgate. Holcombe and Hogan eventually sold Palms Center to
A crowd of shoppers at Palms Center during its heyday, circa 1967.

a New York real estate firm, Collins Tuttle & Co., which then resold it to Helmsley-Spear, the real estate firm owned by Leona and Harry Helmsley, in 1969.9

The surrounding area was safe, and parents could let their children walk to the nearby Baskin-Robbins, the library, or the various stores. The neighborhoods seemed sustainable, and they only strengthened as families seeking permanent housing continued to invest in the area. No one had any reason to believe that the community would deteriorate soon afterwards. Local resident Vivian Vincent would not give anything for the years she spent living near Palms Center. She wishes that children now could understand why their parents invested in the area.10

Vivian’s cherished memories of Palms Center have motivated her to work hard at building up the area to some version of its former glory.

At first, not much seemed to change in the 1950s and 1960s when wealthy black families began to move out of the inner city and into the suburbs near Palms Center—the one exception being the bombing of the home of Riverside Terrace’s first black resident, Jack Caesar. It was only after the number of black households reached a tipping point that more white residents began to flee the area.11 As more black residents moved into nearby neighborhoods, block-busting real estate agencies took advantage of the remaining white residents’ fears by creating an illusion of instability and broke apart the communities.12

By 1970, Southeast Houston had nearly completely transitioned from mostly white to mostly black.13 Instead of bringing in permanent residents and reinforcing the local economy, the real estate agencies drained all of the money out of the neighborhoods and thus erased the key to keeping the area sustainable. Soon, buyers were more interested in reselling rather than committing to a lifelong home, and when no one wanted to buy the homes, the owners began to rent them out. The neighborhood broke down, deed restrictions expired, and the area around Palms Center began to visibly deteriorate.

Lower income levels in the surrounding community translated to decreased sales for businesses in Palms Center, and many tenants began to close up shop. By 1978, as stores were starting to leave in favor of air-conditioned malls and with the death of long-time manager John Trimble, things were going downhill. The declining Palms Center became a less attractive option for Houstonians as more modern shopping malls were constructed throughout the city. Most notable of these was the Galleria, which had opened in 1970 soon after the completion of the 610 West Loop. As rates fell during the economic bust of the 1980s, more low-income residents moved into Southeast Houston and occupied apartment complexes that were created to meet demand during the oil boom of the 1970s.14

The deterioration of the area around the center was heartbreaking to residents who intended to raise their families there for many years to come. They were forced to watch as everything that they loved about their community faded away into disrepair. Newer and younger residents did not see the value in the neighborhoods surrounding Palms Center in the same way that older residents did, and thus efforts to maintain the community diminished. Older residents have fought to restore the neighborhoods, and through their repeated efforts the spirit of the community inspired rejuvenation.

By 1984, Palms Center’s last tenant, J.C. Penney, had left. In 1987 the City of Houston collaborated with private sector developers, the Tillman Trotter Foundation and Palms Center Management Company, to repurpose and revitalize the center. By forming a public/private partnership and funding the redevelopment effort with federal HUD Community Development Block Grant Funds and private sector capital, the city planned to
redevelop Palms Center and revitalize and further strengthen the surrounding community. These early efforts were slow in developing, and ultimately, as a result of ongoing management and federal compliance issues, the city severed ties with the private developers in 1991.17

In an effort to continue the redevelopment of Palms Center, in 1992 the city executed a memorandum of understanding with a nonprofit corporation, The City of Houston Small Business Development Corporation, now known as Houston Business Development, Inc. (HBDi). Under the agreement, HBDi, which was created by the city in 1986 to stimulate economic growth and revitalize underserved neighborhoods, was charged with the added responsibility for redeveloping and managing the Palms Center project. In 1993, after conducting a feasibility study to determine the best use of the project, HBDi began to manage the renamed Palm Center, and they remain there today. Marlon Mitchell, CEO of HBDi, first came to Palm Center in 1992, and the center has clearly improved since that time. Comparing the Palm Center area in 1993 to today, Mitchell says, “In 1993, there was literally nothing taking place, but now there’s a buzz about what potentially could happen in this community.

It’s exciting to see the transformation from what was a deteriorating community to what will be a vibrant, revitalized community in a relatively short period of time.”18

According to Mitchell, an increasing number of Latinos are now moving into the Greater Third Ward, and income levels are generally higher. Census data shows that the share of black residents, who make up just over half of the area’s population, has decreased by about four percent to 32,924, while the share of Latinos has increased by about three percent to 25,962 or forty percent of the total. Black residents of Southeast Houston mostly belong to older age groups; by contrast incoming Latinos are generally young, which means this demographic change will significantly reshape the ethnic makeup of the area in as little as ten years.19 Since the growth of the Latino population is expected to continue, Latinos’ engagement in efforts to revitalize Southeast Houston will become more important as time goes on.20

Today, Palm Center serves the community with a 160,000-square-foot mixed-use complex comprised of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and office suites for small businesses. The center is home to the Harris County Precinct 7 justice of the peace and con-

The Village at Palm Center will be comprised of 154 apartments, 68 townhomes, and 14,500 square feet of retail and commercial space. The diverse building configuration will create a vibrant streetscape.

Photo courtesy of the Village at Palm Center.
stables, the Young Neighborhood Library, Houston Area Urban League, U.S. Post Office, Neighborhood Centers Inc., a dental clinic, and over forty small businesses. The center regularly offers workshops, seminars, and educational programs and has meeting rooms available for events and organizations in the community. Due to new developments such as a park at Palm Center, the METRORail Line, a new Houston Public Library branch, a YMCA, the Oasis InTown townhomes, and the Villages at Palm Center apartment and townhome complex, Mitchell sees the future of the center as a destination area. “The new developments will serve as a stimulus for even further development in the area,” he says.21

There have also been recent efforts to recognize the historical and cultural importance of Palm Center. In 2011, through funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), UH research professor Carroll Parrott Blue directed the Southeast Houston Arts Initiative. Her project included a historical report on Palms Center in order to raise awareness of its importance for future revitalization efforts.22

Neighborhoods of the Greater Third Ward have taken a beating in the past, but the community itself has breathed new life into Southeast Houston. Through dedicated efforts by various individuals and organizations, it seems inevitable that Southeast Houston will bounce back to a very healthy state and prove itself to be resilient in the long run. With nearby destinations such as MacGregor Park, UH, TSU, the Texans YMCA, and the upcoming Southeast METRORail line, the Greater Third Ward is in a period of transition that looks very promising. New investments in infrastructure will help to sustain the surrounding neighborhoods and will enhance the economic strength of Southeast Houston.

Palm Center is like a window through which we can view the shifting economic status and history of its surrounding communities. When the center opened in the 1950s as Houston’s first open-air shopping mall, it was a trendsetter. Today the future looks bright for a revitalized Palm Center, which continues to be a valuable Southeast Houston asset thanks to those who have dedicated their efforts to strengthening this community.

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In 1836 young Johann Frederick Kuhlmann made his way from Germany to America, eventually landing at the port of New Orleans after one of his sea journeys. Remaining in New Orleans working in various jobs, he continuously heard stories about the newly established Republic of Texas and its capital, Houston. To satisfy his curiosity, he made a trip to Houston and liked what he saw: a bustling little town that might provide him a promising future. He returned to New Orleans and soon claimed Mary Ann Heitman as his wife. In 1839, looking ahead to the future, Johann (or John as he was called in America) brought his bride to Texas where the couple began life together on their recently purchased acreage for which John had paid $1 an acre “with buildings and improvements.” The land, totaling 226 acres, lay three miles south of the fledgling town of Houston along Brays Bayou, one of the many streams in the area. The property that John claimed was originally part of the Luke Moore League, granted to Moore on August 3, 1824, by Stephen F. Austin.1

Other members of John Kuhlmann’s family eventually joined him in Texas. Three of his brothers—Daniel Justus, John Heinrich, and George Deadrick—had also emigrated from their hometown of Buchen in the Hanover Province of Germany, settling in Loudon County, Virginia, where they farmed jointly-owned land. When George and John Heinrich (who became known as Henry in America) received a letter from a brother in Germany telling them the whereabouts of their seafaring brother, Johann, they made arrangements to join him on Brays Bayou, hoping to establish their own farms. By the time Henry and George arrived in 1845, John was thirty-three years of age and had acquired additional acreage as well as 100 head of cattle. Henry and George, age twenty-four and twenty-two respectively, soon bought land of their own. After settling into farming his land, Henry met Sophie Henrietta Ulzfeld, who had come to Houston from Germany in 1846. After marrying in 1848, Henry and Henrietta set up housekeeping in a two-room log cabin along the bayou. George returned to Virginia and married Katherine Ann Truslow, whom he brought back to the farm land he had purchased. This was the beginning of a Kuhlmann family compound that a century later was considered a part of Southeast Houston.2

Very few Germans settled in Texas during the Spanish and Mexican periods. Stephen F. Austin wanted to bring Germans into his colony because he admired their character, their industry, and their opposition to slavery. Austin, however, claimed he was only able to recruit five Germans for his colony because of the weather. This reality changed during the early years of the Republic of Texas when German immigration substantially increased. Although many immigrants came through an organized effort by groups such as the Adelsverein (The Society of Noblemen), others were doubtless drawn to Texas by the writings of visitors like Gustave Dresel, who spent the years 1838 to 1840, much of it in Houston, extolling the virtues of living in a place where a “love of freedom and the fair prospect of gain” dominated the landscape. Although no exact figures exist on what percentage of Houston’s early population was German, an 1840 estimate placed it at twenty percent. The availability of land and the prospect of becoming a landowner were obviously significant attractions for these Germans flowing into Texas. This was certainly true for the Kuhlmann brothers. John, in particular, purchased and sold land for the next four decades, becoming one of Harris County’s largest landholders.3

Siblings George Justus Kuhlmann and Adele Kuhlmann Schmeltz, grandchildren of John Heinrich Kuhlmann.

Photo courtesy of Gordon Nettles.

August Louis Kuhlmann, grandson of John Heinrich Kuhlmann.

Photo courtesy of Gordon Nettles.
Following his original purchase, John acquired more land on both sides of Brays Bayou. Realizing the value of property near a stream like Brays Bayou, he extended his land investments to property located near Greens, White Oak, and Buffalo Bayous. During the 1840s John bought nearly 3,000 acres out of the old Pleasant M. Rose Survey, the Brown Survey, and the J. S. Holman Headright. These purchases enabled John to help fifty immigrant families obtain land by providing loan money for them to establish their own twenty-five-acre farms in the area where Fannin Street crosses Brays Bayou today. He also apprenticed some young men in the basics of farm operation. Several of the Kuhlmann land owners expanded their agricultural pursuits by establishing dairies. Brothers August Louis (Gus) and George Justus Jr., grandsons of Henry, formed Kuhlmann Bros. Dairy on the east side of Chocolate Bayou, three miles south of Brays Bayou. They operated it for many years, but when the city began to encroach on their pastureland they sold it for $45 an acre and became contractors, participating in the building boom that accompanied Houston’s population growth in the twentieth century. At the same time, their cousin, Christian Kuhlmann, operated a dairy nearby where grazing fields were plentiful.4

As the brothers farmed along Brays Bayou, their families grew. The 1850 census revealed that John, Henry, and George had six children between them, and more children followed. Other families also settled near the Kuhlmanns. The 1854-1855 Harris County Scholastic Census reported almost forty potential students in the vicinity of the Kuhlmann farms. Since these families lived far outside Houston’s boundaries, they organized
a school for their children. Named the Brays Bayou Community School, it became part of the county school system. According to the Scholastic Census, the enrollment of School District 3, which included Brays Bayou, equaled twenty percent of the total number enrolled in all Harris County public school districts.5

John did not limit his real estate holdings to rural property. Deed records reveal that he also purchased town lots. Some of this property was in Houston’s business district. In 1856 he purchased a store at the corner of Congress and Travis Streets fronting on Market Square. When an 1860 fire damaged the existing building, Kuhlmann constructed a handsome two-story building that initially housed a liquor, cigar, and wine store. At the same time he reconstructed the fire-damaged building adjacent to his that belonged to widow Eliza Stephanes Fox, who had operated a bakery there. Completed in 1866, the new double building became known as the Fox-Kuhlmann Building and survives today as a City of Houston Protected Landmark at 305-307 Travis Street.6

While many of the Kuhlmann family members continued in agricultural pursuits, still others became involved in Houston’s business community. Kuhlmann Floral Co. was a thriving business on Main Street when the massive 1915 hurricane destroyed all of its greenhouses. The business had been established by Henry J. Kuhlmann, but was under the direction of his son, Henry Jr. in 1915. Henry managed to recover from the storm damage, which was placed at $100,000, and by 1920 had located his business in the Rice Hotel. Other businesses were Kuhlmann’s Wood Yard; Kuhlmann’s Hay and Feed Warehouse; Star Bottling Works, manufacturer of soda, sarsaparilla, ginger ale, and mineral waters; Reichardt & Schulte, Dealers in Seeds and Fertilizer; and Walter Kuhlmann’s Laundry Machinery Co. Others pursued independent vocations. Theodore Henry Kuhlmann, a grandson of Henry, was a carpenter. In 1907 he built a home for his bride in the Kuhlmann neighborhood near Scott Street on what became MacGregor Way. When Theodore decided to develop the property in the mid-1930s, he had his home moved three blocks to where it stands today on Charleston Street. Still others through the years were engaged in teaching, ranching, milling lumber, railroading, bookkeeping, and clerking.7

In 1871 another young German immigrated to America with the hope of starting a grocery business in Galveston. When that plan failed, the ambitious twenty-one-year-old Henry Henke moved to Houston and met Henry Kuhlmann’s daughter, Katherine, whom he pursued and soon married. Henke was also successful in pursuing his own business. With very little capital, he opened a grocery store across from Market Square. When he hired a young bookkeeper, Camille Pillot, and made him a partner, the firm of Henke & Pillot was born. The Kuhlmann farms frequently provided produce for the stores and several family members were longtime em-

The Fox-Kuhlmann Building, completed in 1866 at 305-307 Travis Street, is a City of Houston Protected Landmark. Photo courtesy of Mike Vance.
ployees. Charles Heinrich Kuhlmann had a fifty-two-year career with the grocer, while his son, Charles Louis, was the manager of the large South End store for many years. Many long-time Houstonians remember buying groceries from Henke & Pillot, which evolved into a chain of nine-teen stores in Houston and eight more in nearby towns. The local name disappeared after Kroger Corporation acquired the chain in the 1950s. Sophie Reichardt, a granddaughter of John Kuhlmann, also married a promising young businessman, Frederick Boettcher. After their marriage in 1887, the couple lived in Weimar for several years. In 1903, they moved to Houston where Frederick opened Boettcher Produce. A year later he partnered with C. L. Desel, forming Desel-Boettcher Produce Co., which became one of the largest businesses of its kind in the Southwest by purchasing goods from vegetable commission companies and then selling to retail grocers. As boats came into the Main Street landing of Buffalo Bayou, a large sign painted on the Commerce Street building façade greeted them. Desel-Boettcher survived as a major produce source for many years; it was still a thriving operation when Frederick died in 1934.8

During the city’s formative years, the most important society for the German population was the Houston Turnverein, and Charles H. Kuhlmann served as its vice-president in 1910. Established in 1854, the organization occupied an entire block on Texas Avenue where the Turnverein club focused on German ethnic and cultural identity. They sponsored elaborate festivities involving not only athletic and military drills but also balls, concerts, and banquets. By 1869 the Turnverein was organizing the city’s Volksfest each year on their own festival grounds where speeches, gymnastics, music, dancing, and baseball contests entertained those attending. The Turnverein also sponsored German Day, an event held on October 6 each year to commemorate the 1683 arrival of the first German colonist in America. The main event on October 6 each year was a parade featuring elaborate floats.9

As the promise of land ownership in the newly-opened Texas fueled a wave of German immigration in the 1840s, the religious life of the resettled Germans was paramount in the minds of church leaders in Europe. As a result, a missionary school in Basel, Switzerland, sent eight ordained Lutheran ministers to Texas in 1850 and 1851. These men, led by the Reverend Casper Messon Braun, organized the first Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Texas. On July 1, 1851, Rev. Braun founded the Erste Deutsche Evangelische Luthersche Kirche (First German Evangelical Lutheran Church) in Houston. The church was officially issued a charter by the state of Texas two months later. In 1854 the congregation purchased a lot and built its first church on Texas Avenue near Milam Street. A building behind the church was used for a day school. Records do not reveal how active the Kuhlmann families were in those early years. After all, filling a wagon with children, large and small, to make the journey into Houston in all kinds of weather would not have been an easy task. It is obvious, however, that nearly all of the Kuhlmann families considered themselves to be communicants of this little frame church throughout the nineteenth century because burial records show that Rev. Braun, who remained the minister of First German Evangelical Lutheran Church for three decades, held funeral services for family members. In 1902, having outgrown its earlier building, the congregation built an impressive Gothic-styled brick structure on Texas Avenue at Caroline Street where Kuhlmann families worshipped.10

In 1878 when John sold his Brays Bayou farm to his brother, Henry, two acres of the property were dedicated as a family cemetery. The deed cites the cemetery is to be used by the “Kuhlmann (family) or whoever owns or occupies the farm land.” The first recorded burial was that of Mary Ann Heitman Kuhlmann in 1860. Years ago many of the graves were moved to a large Kuhlmann plot at Forest Park Lawndale Cemetery, but family records indicate at least nine burials likely remain in the family cemetery, including John, Mary Ann, and Sarah Kuhlmann, and several of John’s grandchildren. After the death of his first wife, John had married Sarah Stroud Williams and fathered seven more children. The two-acre tract, surrounded today by the homes in Riverside Terrace, was designated in 2004 as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark.11

The land around Brays Bayou remained a rural environment occupied by farms and dairies until the city of Houston began to expand in the 1920s to accommodate its rapidly growing population. In order to provide services for new residential enclaves, the city extended its boundaries in 1927. By 1930 Houston encompassed 72.8 square miles, an increase of forty square miles over the decade. The once-distant Brays Bayou farmlands were now officially part of the city.

Henry MacGregor, a land developer who wanted to extend Houston’s residential area by building subdivi-sions southward along Main Street, had begun residential development of this area as early as 1900. MacGregor died before he could fully pursue his plan, but his wife, Elizabeth, followed the instructions in his will, giving acreage for MacGregor Park and donating land along
Brays Bayou for a scenic drive. The remaining land was sold to other developers who pursued MacGregor’s vision. In 1924 three subdivisions were started surrounding the bayou: Riverside Terrace, Washington Terrace, and Riverside. A lot measuring 50x100 feet sold for $1,800—a sharp contrast to the $1 per acre paid by the Kuhlmann brothers a century earlier. Sales brochures emphasized the suburban garden atmosphere of the subdivisions, yet observed that they were only three miles from the courthouse, long considered the center of Houston. Automobile travel had replaced the tiring wagon trips endured by the Kuhlmanns. What had once been unadorned country habitation was replaced by urban living with many amenities such as sidewalks, gutters, paved streets, electric lights, and telephones.12

Although most of the farms disappeared, many Kuhlmann families continued to be Southeast Houston residents. They, undoubtedly, were one of the largest extended families in the city. Elouise Schmeltz Loonam, great-granddaughter of Henry Kuhlmann, recalls growing up in the 1920s on Griggs Road surrounded by dozens of cousins. She walked one mile to Southland Elementary School, moved on to Johnston Junior High School, graduated from San Jacinto High School in 1939 and from Rice Institute four years later before beginning her teaching career. By then the neighborhood was changing rapidly, yet an article in The Houston Post in 1951 reveals that the area’s rural roots were still deep. The reporter visited Elouise’s parents, Adele and Henry Schmeltz, at their “farm in the city,” noting that their acreage housed cows, chickens, and sheep. In fact, during his visit the sheep were fed fresh squash, corn, and cucumbers grown on the Schmeltz’s “real farm” on Chocolate Bayou Road, which Henry, a retired rural mail carrier, claimed he only farmed as a hobby. The Post reporter described the family’s homestead as “a mecca of quiet and well-being in the midst of a snarling clash of civilized noise and motion.” And, indeed, while their neighbor on one side was family—Aunt Amelia Kuhlmann Serface and Uncle George Kuhlmann Jr.—the neighbor on the other side was a bustling supermarket, whose incinerator bumped their fence. Adele commented in the article that “things are getting altogether too crowded.” This area, however, had been home to scores of Kuhlmanns for several generations and so they stayed.13

The three Kuhlmann brothers—John, Henry, and George—who chose the Brays Bayou territory as their home 175 years ago knew they were choosing fertile land for farming their crops. They probably never imagined that the family roots they were planting would also cultivate the area and help it blossom into a twenty-first-century community for future generations.

Betty Trapp Chapman is a historian who researches, writes, and lectures on Houston history. Although she delves into all aspects of local history, her special areas of interest are women’s history and historic preservation. She is past chair of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission.
Neglected gully gets some love, and a benchmark

By Tony Freemantle

Kuhlman Gully is a quiet 1.09-mile tributary that flows into Brays Bayou. Cavanaugh Nweze remembers it from his childhood: “The Kuhlman Gully gave us many opportunities to play, to just get away from big city life, to skip rocks, and even sometimes to just get in trouble... It played a quiet but important part in our lives. As a child it didn’t seem like much but now, as an adult, I realize how important the Kuhlman Gully is as a natural space and resource and to our neighborhood.”

The once beautiful waterway is today littered with trash; it pollutes the water and can cause clogs in Brays Bayou further down the line leading to flooding. Fortunately, the Southeast Houston Transformation Alliance is spearheading the first steps toward reclaiming Kuhlman Gully for the neighborhood by joining with the Harris County Flood Control District, the City of Houston Public Works and Engineering Department, and Keep Houston Beautiful in community clean-up efforts.

The following article explains how artist Sam Jones is turning the gully’s trash into an artistic treasure as part of the waterway’s beautification projects. It is reprinted with permission from author Tony Freemantle and The Houston Chronicle, where it first appeared on December 16, 2013. Visit our website at www.houstonhistorymagazine.org to watch videos on Kuhlman Gully and the bench project, and link to photos of the thousands of items excavated from the gully. Sam Jones’s public art installation premiers in the late fall of 2014 in Southeast Houston near Kuhlman Gully.

From atop the culvert on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Sam Jones could have been, and was often, mistaken for some kind of official. Maybe somebody from county flood control, or an inspector with the city, a surveyor.

He wore a reflective vest, a baseball cap, waders and a belt from which hung pouches and tools. Occasionally, he would stoop over and stick a little orange survey flag into the bank of the southeast Houston stream they call Kuhlman Gully.

But no one in his or her right mind would have suspected that what Jones was doing was looking for trash. Not just looking for it, but photographing it, measuring it, recording its GPS coordinates, collecting it in plastic bags, cataloging it and treating it with as much care as an archaeologist would priceless artifacts.

There’s a lot of trash in Kuhlman Gully. When Jones started on his project this year, he figured he could cover much of the small tributary’s 1/2-mile length.

But the bounty was so great, he spent days in a single spot, his survey flags sprouting like thick clusters of alien vegetation.

Jones is an artist. His work often involves searching for something, he tells me, and discovering something about himself in the process. So when his friend, University of Houston research professor Carroll Parrott Blue, asked him to be part of a project involving Kuhlman Gully, it seemed like a good fit.

“I asked Sam, because I’ve known him for some time,” Blue said. “I said ‘You know this gully is a junk heap. Why don’t you come out and look at it?’ When we got
out there, you know I was just like disgusted, but he said ‘Wow, this is great.’ I said ‘What are you talking about?’ He said ‘I can make something beautiful out of this.’”

NEGLECTED WORKHORSES
Discarded metal makes for a decorative flourish on a bench local artist Sam Jones built on Kuhlman Gully that will be installed on the banks of the waterway.

Kuhlman Gully is one of thousands of gullies in the Houston area. It drains into Brays Bayou. We are, rightly so, called the Bayou City. But the gullies are the workhorses of the drainage system in the flood-prone coastal prairie we live on. Neglected workhorses. We call them ditches. We clog them with trash. We squeeze them through culverts under the streets. And then we curse them when they back up and flood our houses.

Blue is a member of the Southeast Houston Transformation Alliance, a group working to revitalize that part of town, which includes the historic Third Ward. The group sees the potential of transforming a stretch of Kuhlman Gully into an attractive green space.

PLENTY OF RESOURCES
So far, all the group has to show for its efforts is a “pie-in-the-sky dream plan,” as Blue calls it, created by two University of Houston architecture grad students, and a bench made by Jones using some of the 1,500 or so pieces of trash he collected from the gully.

The plan by students David Rodriguez-Goujon and Shalini Moodley involves a stretch of the gully from MLK to Sunrise Road. Rodriguez-Goujon tells me it involves widening the gully, restoring its ecosystem and alleviating the flooding that occurred most recently during a storm in early 2012.

Their proposal grew out of a project for a class taught by local landscape architects Keiji Asakura and Margaret Robinson, and was presented to the community this month, along with Jones’ bench.

It is hard to describe, that bench. It has three seats made of molded clear epoxy into which some of the gul-

ly’s artifacts are set. One seat contains items that Jones says reflect the “shady” side of the gully - stolen credit cards, condom packages, needles and syringes, knives, a pill bottle.

Another is about kids and being safe, Jones says. It has candy wrappers, a small cowboy boot, a plastic toy, a discarded disciplinary note in which, in childish cursive, a girl acknowledges her behavior in class was “inappropriate because I was distracting everyone.”

The third is an homage to technological history, showing off a VHS video cassette, broken compact discs, a circuit board. The frame is made out of old shopping carts, steel cable, rebar. The backrest contains a rim, a rusted steering wheel and a circular saw blade. Its legs are finished off with shopping cart wheels.

The bench is dedicated to [former] City Council Member Wanda Adams. No one knows where it will sit. Jones favors installing it at the Metro bus stop on MLK where it crosses Kuhlman Gully. He could build a canopy for it with more trash.

“There are still a lot of shopping carts in there,” he says. He would know.
When people hear the name MacGregor Park they likely think of two notable Houstonians: Henry F. MacGregor, a businessman and philanthropist who helped shape Houston’s development in the early twentieth century, and whose family donated the land for the park in his honor; and Olympian Zina Garrison, who became a world champion tennis player through the MacGregor Park Junior Tennis Program in the 1970s and later returned to Houston to encourage others to take up the game. Today the park offers a welcome respite to residents of Southeast Houston by providing a safe, well-maintained park with recreational opportunities for the entire community.

A Grand Vision for Houston Parks

Henry F. MacGregor (1855–1923) was a native of Derry, New Hampshire, and a descendent of the Reverend James MacGregor, who emigrated from Londonderry, Ireland, around 1718. Henry attended the Pinkerton Academy in his hometown and graduated in 1871 from the Bryant and Stratton Commercial College in Manchester, New Hampshire, before spending two years traveling throughout North America and Europe.1

MacGregor arrived in Galveston in 1873 and came to Houston, where he got a job checking cotton on Buffalo Bayou barges for the Houston Direct Navigation Company. At the time, the eighty-mile-long stretch of bayou was Texas’s only reliably navigable waterway, and as a result, much of the state’s cotton crop came via Buffalo Bayou to Houston where it was transferred to barges or boats headed to the port at Galveston.2

A few years later, MacGregor moved to Galveston and joined the Galveston City

Henry F. MacGregor came to the Houston region in 1873 and within ten years had become a co-owner of the Houston Railroad System streetcars.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.
Railroad Company, which operated the city’s streetcar system. He became its secretary and in 1883, with company president William H. Sinclair, bought out the Houston Railroad System streetcars. MacGregor returned to Houston, assumed the roles of vice president and general manager, and led an extensive expansion program. In 1903, he left the company to focus on real estate and other interests, which included lobbying for improvement of the Houston Ship Channel.3

Henry MacGregor married native Houstonian Elizabeth “Peggy” Stevens in 1885. She had attended Houston’s first high school, graduated from the Huntsville Teachers’ College, and taught in Kansas and in Houston before the couple married.4

Henry and Elizabeth, who never had children, played an active role in civic and social affairs. She became deeply involved with construction of the YWCA building in 1920. He belonged to the Z. Z. Club, Thalian Club, Country Club, Caldeonian Society, and the Houston volunteer fire service (Hook & Ladder No. 1), and was a leader in the state Republican Party. Henry also served as a trustee of the George H. Hermann estate, which oversaw the development of Hermann Park and dedicated land for Hermann Hospital following Hermann’s death in 1914.5

MacGregor invested in Houston real estate and had built several subdivisions in the South Main Street area by 1900. His Glen Park Company sold the land off North Main and just north of Buffalo Bayou for the Glen Park neighborhood, a community of eighty-five Craftsman bungalows constructed in the 1920s. He had plans to develop a forty-acre parcel in the Calumet-Binz area, just across Brays Bayou from Hermann Park, before he died on September 3, 1923, at his New Hampshire summer home.6

Elizabeth, with assistance from two relatives, spent the next eight years administering his estate. They selected a portion of the MacGregor land holdings in Southeast Houston, part of the Jessica Addition (reportedly named after Henry’s cow), to be used for a city park. They sold the remainder of the addition to developers to realize Henry’s plans for new subdivisions.7

In 1924, the City Planning Commission retained the Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare to develop the Houston park system, first envisioned by Arthur Coleman Comey in his 1914 report, Houston, Tentative Plans for Its Development.8 Comey’s report recommended creating parks along Houston’s bayous, to use that land more productively, facilitate maintenance of the bayous’ banks, and enhance property values. The MacGregor estate’s donation of land along Brays Bayou for MacGregor Park helped move the city toward that goal.

Kate Sayen Kirkland describes Mrs. MacGregor’s dedication to seeing the plan fulfilled: “Working with city officials and the Park Commission, Peggy MacGregor agreed to furnish land and cash for improvements if the city would build the parkway, and she kept a close watch over the ensuing struggle between developers and park supporters to ensure that the city honor the spirit of her gift, announced April 4, 1926. Her vigilance secured nearly three miles of parkland right-of-way north and south of the bayou and 108 acres of ‘naturalistic recreation,’ the third largest forest preserve in the city at that time.9
To celebrate his friend’s generosity, Will [Hogg] provided two hundred live oak trees on North MacGregor Drive to form a War Mothers Memorial commemorating Harris County’s World War I casualties.  

R. O. Bosworth of Howe & Wise, Engineers surveyed the land in 1926, and three years later, Hare & Hare, which carried out much of Houston’s park development through the 1950s, drew up preliminary plans for the park. In the mid-1930s, Hare & Hare produced a revised plan and map of the North and South MacGregor roadways, along with a planting plan for the parkway between them from Scott to Calhoun Street. These drawings show a marked change from a mostly natural space with trails and picnic areas to a design that called for construction for recreational facilities.

During the early- to mid-twentieth century, suburban subdivisions were built around the park, including Riverside Terrace, an affluent neighborhood of large homes occupied by some of Houston’s most prominent business professionals. By the 1950s and 1960s, affluent black families were moving out of historically black inner city neighborhoods toward the suburbs. Although both white and black residents of Riverside Terrace favored an integrated neighborhood, by 1960 the section north of Brays Bayou was ninety-five percent black. According to historian Stephen Fox, selling these homes “coincided with the expiration of deed restrictions in these sections, which allowed strip shopping centers, garden apartments, churches, and motels to be constructed on the sites of many of the larger houses. The southern sections succumbed to real estate pressure during the 1960s.”

Even as these neighborhood transitions occurred, the city expanded MacGregor Park’s amenities to include a recreation center building, pool and bathhouse, baseball field, and two tennis courts. In 1961, the architecture firm of MacKie & Kamrath was asked to add eight additional tennis courts (with space for three more), and a new clubhouse, allowing for future expansion of the recreation center.

The park includes a stone memorial to Henry MacGregor, designed by Houston architect William Ward Watkin, and a statue of Elizabeth MacGregor that once stood in the Peggy’s Point Plaza Park, named for her, at the corner of South Main Street and Richmond Avenue. Henry’s will called for a statue of his wife, and Gutzon Borglum was commissioned to create it in 1927, just before he started work on his most famous sculpture, Mount Rushmore. The Peggy statue depicts Elizabeth as a young woman with an outstretched hand, in bas relief bronze mounted on rough white granite. The Houston Municipal Art Commission restored the statue and moved it to MacGregor Park in 1997.
In 2005, MacGregor Park received a $1 million make-over, thanks to a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Division, and an additional $600,000 in improvements in 2009 as part of Houston’s Parks To Standards program. Park facilities today include a community center building, playground, tennis center, lighted sports field, swimming pool, weight room, meeting room, eighteen-hole disc golf course, 1.25-mile hike and bike trail, picnic areas, and an outdoor basketball pavilion.

Reaching out to Neighborhood Youth
Perhaps MacGregor Park’s most powerful legacy from the 1970s and beyond is the MacGregor Park Junior Tennis Program. The program, founded by John Wilkerson, touched the lives of thousands of young Houstonians, perhaps none more emphatically than professional tennis legends Zina Garrison and Lori McNeil. From 1993 until 2011, the Zina Garrison Academy carried the torch of the Junior Tennis Program, reuniting these three Houston tennis figures as they shared their passion with the next generation of youngsters.

For all its grand success, the MacGregor Park program had decidedly humble origins. John Wilkerson first picked up a racquet in high school but got his break in tennis as an enlisted man in the U.S. Army. His commanding officer, a colonel, placed him on the Army team so the colonel would have someone to play tennis with during his lunch hour. Wilkerson spent the rest of his Army years playing in Germany. When he returned to the United States, he enrolled at Texas Southern University, where he qualified for the U.S. Open.

After graduation, Wilkerson got a job coaching tennis at MacGregor Park. Though at first he charged a fee to coach, he was unsatisfied working with the “professional” kids and decided to open up a free program. That decision was not without its detractors at tournaments because his players had some of the best coaches in the area. When Wilkerson’s Junior Tennis players, armed with talent and dedication, began winning tournaments, the parents of other players (many of whom were paying coaches hundreds of dollars each month) wondered why the MacGregor players were so successful.

The secret was in the training regimen: practice under Coach Wilkerson was intense. Junior Tennis program alumnus Leon Belcher recounted the year-round schedule, “Every minute. Every day. Sunup to sundown.” Sessions began every summer morning with a three-mile run, followed by hours of endless practice and drills, before ending with another three-mile run at sundown. But the intensity paid off, both on and off the court. These young men and women paid their dues in blood, sweat, and tears — and forged an unbreakable bond.

Larry Thomas, another Junior Tennis alum, recalled the camaraderie, saying, “We ate together, argued together, smiled together, fought together.”

Through all of the hard work of their regimens, the young men and women of the MacGregor Park Junior Tennis Club learned perhaps their most important lessons, lessons that took them far beyond the courts: accountability and personal responsibility. Universally, the alumni heralded the efforts of Coach Wilkerson in teaching both mental and physical discipline through his program. Though Garrison and McNeil were his most famous pupils, Wilkerson noted, “Everybody talks about the tennis program, they speak of Zina and of Lori, but I tell them that is not the success of the story. The success of the story is these guys here who are lawyers, doctors, professionals. People don’t hear about that. That’s what it’s all about.”

One of the program’s most important elements was in the service it provided to the community along Brays Bayou. As word got out that the MacGregor Park Junior Tennis Program was pumping out prodigies such as Zina Garrison and Lori McNeil, mobs of kids swarmed the park in the summer to try their hand at tennis. The older, more experienced members of the program assisted Coach Wilkerson and his staff as mentors. When a single summer could see thousands of youths taking advantage of the free program, it was all hands on deck! John Wilkerson always said his main goal was to use his program to develop good people, good citizens here in Houston. Tennis was only the byproduct. Many earned full scholarships through their dedication, paying for their education beyond the court.

Only two decades before the Junior Tennis Program got started, Althea Gibson had broken the color barrier in professional tennis, crossing from the black American Tennis Association (ATA) into the previously segregated United States Tennis Association (USTA). In 1951, Gibson became the first black woman to compete at Wimbledon and went on to become the first black champion in July 1957. Arthur Ashe followed in her footsteps as one of the best African American tennis players in the United States, peaking at a world ranking of number one.
He was the only black man to win singles at Wimbledon, the U.S. Open, and the Australian Open.20 Despite the efforts of black tennis players in tearing down barriers in the 1950s and 1960s, very few blacks played tennis. Professional tennis continued to be a mostly white world, and racism remained an ever-present issue. On multiple occasions attending tournaments, the organizers questioned the credentials of Zina and Lori. Were they really tennis players? Were they cheating? Were they actually young enough to play in the junior level? But play they did. The exposure brought by Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe — and increasingly, from Zina Garrison, Lori McNeil, Coach John Wilkerson, and the rest of the Junior Tennis squad — led the Houston community to realize that something special was going on in MacGregor Park.21

The story of the MacGregor Park Junior Tennis Program rippled out far beyond the local. Indeed, Zina Garrison was the first black woman since Althea Gibson to make it to the top ten, and the first black player, male or female, since Arthur Ashe. The park was immensely popular during this heyday, hosting celebrity fundraisers that included Arthur Ashe, Houston Oiler Earl Campbell, comedian and actor Bill Cosby, and baseball great Joe Morgan.22

Wilkerson recalled the moment he realized he had something special on his hands. His ambitions to develop a healthy outlet in the community had grown into something far beyond that. “I didn’t start out to develop any kind of champion. I just wanted to develop some good tennis players, and Zina and Lori, those guys had gotten so good. I knew nothing about national tournaments. And one of the coaches asked me, ‘Are you going to the national tournament?’ I said, ‘What?’ [He said,] ‘Are you going to the national tournament?’ I said, ‘What?’ He said, ‘Your girls are one and two, they haven’t contacted you?’ I said, ‘No, no way.’ I finally called the Houston Tennis Association, Texas Tennis Association and you know what their response was? ‘We didn’t know if you wanted to go!’”23

Though he did not set out to develop champions, the hard work, dedication, and ambition of the Junior Tennis Program participants gained him two superstars. The moment Garrison went pro, she was already ranked number twenty-six in the world. She rose all the way to number four in the world, and Lori McNeil (daughter of former NFL player Charlie McNeil) was close at her heels at number eight. Lori McNeil played tennis for Oklahoma State University before going pro in 1984. She won thirty-two doubles titles and in 1994 upset defending champion Steffi Graf during a first-round match at Wimbledon. Since retiring in 2002, McNeil has served as a U.S. Tennis Association coach and was appointed assistant coach to the U.S. Olympic team in 2004.24 In 2012, McNeil joined the staff of the Zina Garrison Tennis Academy.

Zina Garrison’s career began with strong performances as a junior player, she won her first national title at the age of fourteen. In 1981, she won the junior titles at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. Garrison played professionally for fifteen years, winning at least one singles or doubles title each year. She also captured a gold medal in women’s doubles and a bronze medal in women’s singles at the 1988 Olympics.25 In 1993, she established the Zina Garrison Tennis Academy in Houston. John Wilkerson serves as the senior director of tennis, and Lori McNeil serves as the director of tennis.26

In the 1920s, Henry MacGregor’s family sought to improve the quality of life for Houston residents by giving the land for MacGregor Park. Little did they know that the greenspace they so lovingly offered would not only provide a welcome respite for Houstonians, but it would also nourish the minds and bodies of generations of young people through the MacGregor Park Junior Tennis Program. The lessons that John Wilkerson taught his tennis squads over the years rang true in all aspects of life, “You are stronger, you are better than you think you are. You are unlimited. There’s nothing that you can’t accomplish if you put your mind to it.”27 Inspirational words that changed the lives of the thousands of children who came up through the MacGregor Park Tennis Program, words that continue to shape their lives as adults guiding the next generation of southeastern Houstonians.

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On November 9, 2005, Ruby Lee Braziel, my grandmother, suffered a mild stroke in her home and was rushed to Houston’s St. Luke’s Hospital. When I returned home from school, my father, Darwin Allen Sr., told me what had happened – sad news that any grandson would hate to hear. Several thoughts flooded my mind at once. Why on my birthday of all days? What would happen to my grandmother’s church now that her ability to pastor had been altered? More importantly, why had it not occurred to me that she was just as human as anyone else?

My sense of urgency to get to the hospital grew by the minute. I soon learned that my parents had long thought about many of my fears and questions. What I saw as a day that stood still in time simultaneously beckoned a long-awaited transition. Many church-goers recognized this simply as “God’s will.” Once my family and I arrived at St. Luke’s, we found my grandmother in mild discomfort but alert and resting. Although she was aware of what had happened, the mild stroke did not restrain my grandmother from encouraging others who tried to out-encourage her.

I decided that I would not join my peers at Lamar High School for the speech and debate tournament that weekend in Harlingen, Texas, or so I thought. My efforts to explain such a presumptuous decision to my grandmother were futile. She essentially said that she did not raise any of her grandchildren to bail out when life got tough and that I should see all my commitments to their fruition. Amazed at such wisdom, I obeyed.

That semester I was a freshman at Lamar in River Oaks, which was unlike anything in my grandmother’s experience as a young African American woman working in Houston. A couple of months before her stroke, she drove me to Lamar for the first and last time. I had missed the school bus, and my grandmother, then seventy-seven years old, drove me to River Oaks from Sunnyside, a predominantly black neighborhood in Southeast Houston. She marveled over how much Houston, and particularly River Oaks, had changed. During the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, she worked as a housemaid for a wealthy white family in River Oaks, Houston’s most affluent neighborhood. It probably had not occurred to her under the oppression of Jim Crow, which civil rights activism had yet to reverse, that her descendants would one day attend Lamar, then an all-white school under the separate but equal rule.

Before our arrival at Lamar, we got lost temporarily on San Jacinto Street, clueless that Lamar stood only a short distance away. My grandmother knew the area...
well, but dementia interfered with her recollection. It did not occur to me then that Alzheimer’s had crept into her memory the same way it had her mother’s. Once we arrived, I thanked her and asked if she would be fine driving home.

Before I dashed to class, I sat there for several minutes gazing and smiling at my grandmother. We had almost returned home during our search, but by God’s grace we made it. Observing my grandmother closely, I noticed that she had something on her mind. It probably had to do with River Oaks, her youth, the struggle for equality as a woman and an African American, Lamar High School, and the weight of her ministry. It also involved seeing her grandson enjoying the privileges of the twenty-first century and the need for me to learn the hard way to find my own identity, pioneer my own frontier, and understand the consequences of her legacy. Those five minutes were a snapshot of her life, and I was too young, ignorant, and untested to fully comprehend the moment—a moment that started in the summer of 1928.

Juanita Wells gave birth to Ruby Breedlove on August 12, 1928, in Navasota, Texas. Ruby grew up Catholic and attended the Navasota schools until the eighth grade when work and moving to Houston took priority over finishing school. Ruby’s era, characterized by intense racism, defined her, as it did many people. In addition, at age thirteen, she witnessed the U.S. entry into World War II.

According to my mother, Pamela Braziel-Allen, my grandmother met my grandfather, William C. Braziel, in Houston’s Fifth Ward in the mid-1940s. He was from Waco, Texas, and four years older than her. Ruby had lovely caramel brown skin, and William had handsome, dark, ebony skin. Their story was a classic among many love stories of the Second World War—a soldier came home from the war, and the ladies gazed upon him with honor, excitement, and romanticism.

Ruby and William had moved to Houston for purely social and economic reasons. Both had family there, and Houston was a booming city with employment opportunities during and after the war. While on Army duty, my grandfather wrote letters to his sweetheart. After the war, William Braziel and Ruby Breedlove united in holy matrimony and, in the late 1940s, gave birth to two sons, Charles and William Jr. My grandmother was eighteen years of age and my grandfather was twenty-two.

My grandmother’s life took a dramatic and positive turn in the early 1950s when she “heard the Christian gospel preached in a way that she [had] never experi-

**Overseer Ruby L. Braziel in 1984.**

enced” before that time. My mother explained that when my grandparents and great-grandmother, Juanita Wells, moved to Houston they decided to join the Baptist faith. Although my grandmother’s ancestors had built the first black Catholic church in Navasota, she subconsciously thirsted for something greater within Christendom. That thirst was quenched in the Holiness Movement, also known as the Pentecostal Charismatic wave or experience, which swept the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The Holiness Church and Pentecostals, unlike the Catholics and Baptists in that era, believed in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, miracles, divine healing, speaking in tongues, and boisterous praise and worship to God.

The man responsible for her spiritual rebirth was Bishop Augustus Bonds, a classically holiness preacher born in the early 1890s. One day, a friend of my grandmother’s began expounding on Bond’s deliverance preaching and evangelism, and encouraged her to attend his meeting. She heeded her friend’s advice and was struck enthusiastic by Bishop Bond’s charismatic preaching, demonstration of the Spirit, magnetic personality, and gift for drawing hundreds to his open-air and tent meetings. She had witnessed this bishop cast unclean spirits out of men, make the lame walk, cause the mute to talk, utter accurate words of prophecy, and preach godliness in no-nonsense fashion compared to other black Houston clergymen at the time. Before attending her first service under Bishop Bonds, my grandmother had contemplated divorcing my grandfather and taking her sons and mother to live with her older half-sister in Los Angeles. But, when Bishop Bonds began to preach on divorce and remarriage, my grandmother decided that she had no choice but to give her life to Jesus Christ if she intended to continue in her marriage, and she did.

Immediately after her salvation, Ruby Braziel zealously committed her life to God. She joined Bishop Bonds’s church, God’s Holy Tabernacle, located in the Fifth Ward, and became an active participant in the Willing Workers, a choir and altar workers group dedicated to worship, evangelism, and prayer. Ruby quickly became a missionary, began leading congregational services, and preached the gospel when the opportunity arose. As her gift for the ministry became evident, Bishop Bonds sent her out in the office of Evangelist to hold revivals in Louisiana. Missionary Braziel had become a rising star at God’s Holy Tabernacle, but her mission from God soon created a conflict with her bishop.
Ruby Braziel firmly believed in the divorce and remarriage doctrine as taught by her bishop stating that God designed marriage to be between one husband and one wife until death nullifies the marriage. When Bishop Bonds decided to remarry, Braziel took a leave of absence from God’s Holy Tabernacle that lasted three months. By this time, she had long moved from the Fifth Ward to Sunnyside in Southeast Houston.

My grandmother rehearsed this incident with me on several occasions. Although Bishop Bonds eventually admitted that his remarriage was an error, it did not give Braziel a moral license to leave his church. Braziel returned to God’s Holy Tabernacle and submitted herself to her bishop. Missionary Braziel sat under Bishop Bonds for three additional years when God spoke to him to send his spiritual daughter to Sunnyside to establish a work for God, which ultimately made her one of the first women pastors in Houston.

My grandmother’s generation is a remarkable one. Just as she emerged in Houston during the 1950s, so did Pastor John Osteen of Lakewood Church and Reverend William “Bill” Lawson. John Osteen gave his life to Christ at the age of seventeen in 1939 in Fort Worth, Texas. Osteen’s ministry eventually compelled him to relocate to Houston in the 1950s and pastor Lakewood, originally a Southern Baptist turned charismatic, non-denominational church. In 1958, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit and experienced the sensation of speaking in diverse spiritual tongues. Already pastoring, this experience inspired Osteen to seek a deeper experience with God and cemented his growing belief in miraculous healing following his daughter Lisa’s recovery from “seemingly insurmountable health problems.” Pastor Osteen is revered today as one of the foremost faith healers of the twentieth century.2

Reverend William Lawson, of Kansas City, Missouri, arrived in Houston in August 1955. Reverend Lawson founded the Baptist Student Union at Texas Southern University and, seven years later, established Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Like Osteen and Braziel, Lawson is an icon in Houston’s Christian community.3 John Osteen and R. L. Braziel had the pleasure of meeting each other once, and my mother is well acquainted with Missionary Braziel.

In 1961, the church began construction of its first sanctuary, which opened the following year. From 1962
to 1965, Missionary Braziel held tryouts for male preachers who believed God had called them to pastor The Lord Jesus Christ Holiness Church. Several male pastors, elders, and bishops tried, but none had the divine appointment to pastor the church at 3717 Barberry. My grandmother had always been the rightful pastor and founder of TLJCHC, but she let male pastors and preachers act as leaders of the work she established. She did this because she understood the social consequences and the kind of reception a woman pastor would receive in a Christian culture where it remained highly taboo for a woman to pastor a church.

At the end of the three-year trial, Missionary Braziel received a divine visitation from Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who ordered her not to sit under any male preacher or pastor but to take full responsibility of TLJCHC as pastor and overseer, a position comparable to that of a bishop. From then on, Overseer Braziel led the church she had planted with full force. She had finally received her rightful role in Christendom, but opposition soon followed.

In the 1950s and 1960s, being a woman pastor or aspiring to that position remained unpopular. Several male pastors denounced my grandmother as a heretic, and she frequently heard that God did not call women to pastor. Overseer Braziel was denied access to pulpits and deliberately overlooked by many men in Houston’s ultra-conservative, black church establishment. Protestors demonstrated across the street from her church, and one of those protestors, according to my mother, was George Foreman, the professional boxer. When many expected my grandmother to retaliate, she did not; she stood firm in her identity and chose love over hate.

In 1956, the United Presbyterian Church voted to ordain women, and the following year Priscilla Chaplin became its first woman pastor. Although Rev. Chaplin broke the Church’s traditional barrier, it was not without a struggle. After she finished her bachelor’s degree at New York’s Union Theological Seminary, several parishioners ignored her application to pastor until a 130-member parish in Sauquoit, New York, gave a flicker of hope. Rev. Chaplin and Overseer Braziel’s struggle for equality opened the door to greater opportunity for women in the coming generations.

In 1981, Overseer Braziel, with a consistent membership of seventy people, began construction on a second sanctuary a few yards away from the first one on Barberry Drive. The second building took approximately twelve months to build and opened its doors on the first Sunday of August 1982. It was truly a spectacle: the largest church in the Southside of Houston complete with chandeliers, a balcony, office space, and well-conditioned pews uprooted from a local Catholic church that had moved into a new building. Many marveled, scores of male preachers and pastors became envious, and the black community throughout Houston looked upon Sunnyside with enthusiasm. Bishop Bonds soon realized that his prophecy about a powerful preacher rising to take his mantle was a woman, Overseer Braziel.

Since the start of Overseer Braziel’s ministry, her trademark across Houston has been that of a modern-day apostle. Apostles were known for their message of grace and salvation and frequent demonstration of miracles, divine healing, signs, wonders, and the ability to pioneer new territories. Members of The Lord Jesus Christ Holiness Church witnessed Overseer Braziel heal the sick, raise the dead, change countless lives, feed the hungry, and clothe the poor; but most of all, members of TLJCHC experienced a relationship with Jesus Christ in deeper and unimaginable ways.

From 1957 to 2005, Overseer Braziel faithfully preached the gospel. She started her radio ministry in the early 1970s and could be heard live on 1360 AM radio on Saturdays at 2:00 p.m. In 1998, Overseer launched her television ministry and soon after began grooming her daughter, my mother, for the ministry.

In December 2005, a month after Overseer R. L. Braziel’s mild stroke, the church announced that Pamela Braziel-Allen would become the next pastor of The Lord Jesus Christ Holiness Church. The following month, my mother was ordained as pastor, and my father became an elder, the head minister, and co-pastor soon after.

Today my grandmother is doing well and is in good spirits. Despite the stroke nearly nine years ago and old age, she is quite mobile, strong in faith, restful, and happily watching the fruits of her labor of love. The work she started half a century ago as founder of TLJCHC runs strong. Under the leadership of Pastor Allen, The Reformer, TLJCHC’s membership continues to increase, marriages are flourishing, families are growing stronger, and the auxiliaries are adapting to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

Travis Braziel is a senior history and political science major at the University of Houston. He is the grandson of Overseer Ruby L. Braziel, founder of The Lord Jesus Christ Holiness Church.
In many ways, Houston is a marriage of opposites—beautiful green space and booming refineries; growing trees and expanding concrete; sprawling suburbs and concentrated neighborhoods; pride in its heritage and a drive for progress.

History and progress have come together in a new Houston project, the Southeast Corridor of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County’s (METRO) light rail system set to open in 2014. The ten stations along the route, connecting to downtown through the EaDo/Stadium stop near BBVA Compass Stadium and ending at the Palm Center Transit Center, will inform riders about the history of Africans and African Americans in Houston and Texas.

The stations along the route, many in Houston’s predominantly African American neighborhoods, highlight eight different themes in black history: pioneer, community, emancipate, educate, contribute, protect, dream, and empower. Each station’s mural, which envelopes the rider waiting on the platform, is designed to evoke a feeling of protection through both the West African belief in the written words’ protective power and the physical windscreen that the mural provides for the visitors. All of these things come together to tell the history of “ordinary people doing extraordinary things.”

**PIONEER (1528-1865)**

The journey along the Southeast Line of the METRORail begins at the Leeland / Third Ward station just outside of downtown. The mural at the southbound platform, Pioneer, tells the history of Texas slavery. The first African known to arrive in the area, a man named Esteban from Morocco, found himself marooned near Galveston with other survivors of a shipwreck in 1528. In 1689 Sebastian Rodriguez Brito, born in Angola, lived among the earliest settlers in El Paso in West Texas. One hundred years later, blacks and mulattos made up fifteen percent of the province’s population.

Mexico abolished slavery when it controlled Texas. This drew free blacks from the United States to the area along with the other American settlers in the early nineteenth century. As the slaveholding settlers fought for an independent republic of Texas with legalized slavery in the 1830s, many blacks sided with Mexico and attempted to escape behind the Mexican army’s lines.

Slavery became legal again in 1836 when the Republic of Texas won its independence from Mexico and continued after Texas became a state in 1845. The institution grew rapidly, reaching a quarter of a million slaves by the conclusion of the Civil War. Slavery ended in Texas on June 19, 1865, Juneteenth, with the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, Texas, by Major General Gordon Granger. This opened the way for free African Americans to resettle in the location of their choice, and many chose Houston.

**EMANCIPATE (1863-1898)**

Picking up the light rail from the Leeland station, travelers head south across Interstate 45 and next arrive at the Elgin/Third Ward station. Here, riders learn about Reconstruction in Texas and the role of Norris Wright Cuney. After the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, the slow and difficult process of integration of the newly freed African Americans into general society began.

Norris Wright Cuney was born in 1846 near Hempstead, Texas. His father was a white planter, and his mother was a slave. After the Civil War, he settled in Galveston and became interested in politics and studied law. There he became the president of the...
The installed mural at the Palm Center Transit Center tells of women’s importance in the fight for racial equality in Houston. Photo by Hall Puckett courtesy of Sara Kellner.
Galveston Union League, a Galveston County school director, and the secretary of the Republican Executive Committee in Texas. Cuney’s appointment to first assistant to the sergeant-at-arms of the Twelfth Legislature in 1870 allowed him to act as a delegate to the Republican National Convention for the next twenty years. His most influential position, however, was as Texas national committeeman of the Republican Party. In these roles, Cuney fought for the rights of his fellow African Americans. He helped organize the Screwmen’s Benevolent Association, a group of black dockworkers, and provided tools for their jobs. Norris Wright Cuney exhibited the important role played by many African Americans in Texas during Reconstruction, causing one historian to refer to this time period as the “Cuney Era.”

EDUCATE (1865-2004)
Heading south along Scott Street, the Robertson Stadium/UH/TSU station is the next stop on METRO-Rail’s Southeast Line. Here, nestled between the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, riders learn about Houston’s African American educators.

Most notable was John Henry “Jack” Yates. Born as a slave in Virginia, he learned to read from his owner’s children, an opportunity rarely afforded to slaves. After the Civil War ended, Yates moved his family to Houston where education and religion remained important to him. He became an ordained minister and preached at Antioch Baptist Church in downtown. Yates’s service to the African American community included erecting schools, helping to coordinate assistance from the American Missionary Association and the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the creation of the Freedmen’s Academy, which educated black teachers. In 1885 Yates also assisted with the opening of Houston College.

A number of other schools opened to serve the growing black community. Booker T. Washington High School and Jack Yates High School honored both national and local champions of education. The Mabel Wesley Elementary School was named for another local educator who rose from being the daughter of slaves to become a school principal. Her son, Carter Wesley, became an influential civic leader in his own right.

By the late twentieth century a number of African Americans from the Third Ward had become leading educators. Dr. Roderick Paige worked at Texas Southern University and was elected to Houston Independent School District’s (HISD) Board of Education in 1989 before becoming the district’s superintendent five years later. In 2001 Paige became the U.S. Secretary of Education. In 1990 Dr. Marguerite Ross Barnett became the first African American president of the University of Houston and the first black female to hold such a role in the United States. Finally, the Lonnie E. Smith Neighborhood Library, located between the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, honors a black activist most well-known as the plaintiff in Smith v. Allwright, the Supreme Court case that ended the white primary and allowed black voters to participate in the democratic process.

PROTECT (1865-1918)
Back on the light rail, riders follow along the southern edge of UH to arrive at the southbound platform of the

Norris Wright Cuney, the son of a southern planter and a slave, fought for the rights of African Americans in Texas after Emancipation. His role as Texas national committeeman of the Republican Party beginning in 1886 was the most prestigious political role held by a southern black man in the 1800s.
The Camp Logan incident and Emmett J. Scott’s attempts to uplift the black community exemplify the different ways African American Houstonians “fought the good fight” after the Civil War and into the early twentieth century.

**DREAM (1954-1968)**

Crossing south through MacGregor Park, the METRORail’s next stop is the MacGregor Park/Martin Luther King Jr. station. This platform celebrates the work of Martin Luther King Jr. and Houstonian Reverend William Lawson in the local civil rights movement.

Although King had been a leader in the civil rights movement since the mid-1950s, by 1967 his popularity had begun to decline as he started speaking out against the Vietnam War—both the monetary cost and the injustices against human rights. King felt the civil rights and the anti-war movements needed to work together, but many did not respond well to this suggestion and King’s supporters and donors dropped off.

On October 16, 1967, King was scheduled to speak at the Sam Houston Coliseum in downtown as a part of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s “Poor People’s Campaign.” Despite an all-star lineup including Harry Belafonte and Aretha Franklin, only 500 people trickled into the 5,000 capacity Coliseum.

Houston’s African American preachers also failed to support King during his 1967 visit to the city. No pulpit was opened for the famous orator. Only one local minister reached out in support, Rev. William Alexander Lawson. The founder of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church just south of the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, Lawson was also one of the founders of the Afro-American Studies Program at UH. He fought Jim Crow racism and served the city through a community center, job assistance, voter registration, and more. As Martin Luther King Jr. rallied for equality and civil rights on a national level, Rev. Lawson helped organize the local movement to remove the injustices of Jim Crow and usher in a better future.

**EMPOWER (1900-2000)**

The Southeast Line ends at the Palm Center Transit Center. Here the light rail riders learn about the important role that Houston women played in the local civil rights movement. Three women are highlighted in the text on the panel: Lulu Belle White, Hattie Mae White, and Barbara Charlene Jordan.

Lulu Belle White was born in 1900 and dedicated much of her life to encouraging strong African American representation within local and state government. She believed that community involvement in government would help people commit to the greater cause. White promoted political education, black candidates, and voter registration.

Hattie Mae White followed the encouragement of Lulu Belle White and became the first African American elected to office in Texas since Reconstruction. She began her community involvement when she was elected to the YWCA Metropolitan Board of Directors in 1942. In
1956 White spoke about inequality in the school system; encouraged to do more, she ran for and was elected to the HISD Board. Her surprise election was the product of a community effort, marking a turn in the greater community’s commitment to African American political involvement.

Rising through the ranks of local politics and serving under Harris County’s judge, Barbara Charlene Jordan was the first African American elected to the Texas State Senate in over eighty years. In 1972, she became the first African American in Congress from Texas. A champion of the working class, the disabled, racial minorities, and women, Jordan is perhaps most well-known for her speech during the Watergate scandal in 1974 in which she declared, “My faith in the Constitution is whole. It is complete.”

Also featured on the panel is an article on Christia Adair, who championed the civil rights cause as a leader in the local NAACP. As a young woman in South Texas, she worked for women’s suffrage, only to find that black women were still excluded from Texas primary elections. She later became one of the first black women to vote in a Democratic primary after the Supreme Court struck down Texas’s white primary in 1944. As executive secretary of the Houston NAACP for twelve years, she and others desegregated the Houston airport, public libraries, city buses, and department store dressing rooms. Despite official harassment, Adair and others rebuilt the Houston NAACP chapter, which grew to 10,000 members.

**CONTRIBUTE (1930-1939)**

Heading back towards downtown from the Palm Center station, riders will see two additional panels on the return that complete their historical journey. The first is at the UH South/University Oaks station where the northbound platform tells of R. R. Grovey and the Hall of Negro Life of the 1930s.
The 1930s saw an increase in community awareness and a fight for black rights. Many African Americans living at the time descended from slaves but had not been slaves themselves, yet they lived in the deeply segregated world of Jim Crow laws. The term “New Negro” began to be used to describe this new generation of blacks that had never lived in bondage.

Houstonian Richard Randolph Grovey embraced the ideology of the New Negro movement: “economic independence, cultural consciousness, and prudent constructionalism.” Grovey led the group Houston New Negroes and encouraged others to defend their rights. The group brought the lawsuit *Grovey v. Townsend* to protest exclusion of blacks in Democratic primary elections, but the Supreme Court upheld the exclusion, claiming the party was a private institution. The state’s racist primary election practice was not overturned for another nine years with *Smith v. Allwright*, as noted on the Educate panel.

In 1936 in conjunction with others in the state, the Houston New Negroes helped create the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial in Dallas. The Hall debunked many stereotypes about African Americans and celebrated the work the community had accomplished since emancipation. Paintings, essays, books, photographs, and more were on display at the Hall and included works by W. E. B. DuBois, Harriet Tubman, and Booker T. Washington, among others.

The exhibit welcomed over 400,000 visitors during the six-month long Centennial celebration. For many black Houstonians, the New Negro movement along with the success of the Hall of Negro Life inspired and strengthened the civil rights movement in the city. 10

**COMMUNITY (1840-2010)**

The final stop is back at the Leeland/Third Ward station. The windscreens on the northbound platform reflect on the history of the Third Ward. Houston’s ward system was developed in 1840, just four years after the city was founded. After emancipation, free blacks found themselves relegated to specific areas within the wards. Many African Americans chose to live in the Third Ward, and as whites moved out of the area, the black population surged.

The Third Ward became a city within the city. Black-owned businesses, restaurants, nightclubs, and housing lined the main thoroughfare, Dowling Street. Emancipation Park offered a place for families to gather to celebrate, meet, and play. The Eldorado Club, next to the park, hosted renowned entertainers like Cab Calloway, jazz musicians, and big bands.

The nearby Franklin Beauty School and Tyler Barber College trained many African Americans in the beauty and barber professions. Black physicians practiced in the Third Ward, and the Riverside General Hospital, previously called the Houston Negro Hospital, served the area.

The community also built a number of churches in the Third Ward. Trinity United Methodist Church, the oldest black church in Houston, was founded prior to the Civil War. Wesley Chapel AME Church and St. John Missionary Baptist Church, built in 1875 and 1889 respectively, are still important congregations in the Third Ward today.

Schools played a vital role in the development of the Third Ward. Jack Yates High School, the second black high school in Houston, originally acted as the meeting place for classes of the Houston Junior College for Negroes, which later became Texas Southern University.

Some of these structures still exist today, but many have been demolished. The city within a city has almost disappeared, but a strong sense of community and pride remains with the residents of the Third Ward. 11

Performers entertain a crowd at Emancipation Park in the Third Ward, circa 1970. The park has been used since its creation as a place to gather, celebrate, and remember.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.
Today, when anyone can serve in the military regardless of color, religion, or sexual preference, many people tend to forget about a time when African Americans first earned the right to enlist in the military.

Given the name Buffalo Soldiers by Native Americans because of their fierce fighting ability, these African American men fought during the Civil War and opened many doors for minorities who wanted to serve in the armed forces.

Even war movies and history books often overlook the contributions of these trailblazers or reduce comments about them to small blurbs. Unlike pop stars and famous individuals who fought for civil rights, the stories of these men are not always kept alive through television specials or national holidays. When the last of the Buffalo Soldiers dies, who will keep their legacy alive?

The founder of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum in Houston, Texas, Captain Paul J. Matthews hopes to answer this question. Capt. Matthews, a Vietnam veteran and African American military historian, began collecting military artifacts over thirty years ago and established the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum in 2001 (see Houston History v.7 n.2). Home to hundreds of years of history—not only African American history but also American history—the museum quickly outgrew its space on Southmore Boulevard as others added to the collection. This necessitated a move to a larger space, and Matthews found the perfect location in the nearby former Light Guard Armory Building. Located on the edge of downtown Houston in the Museum District, the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum has the largest collection of African American military memorabilia in the world.

“This is not a ‘black’ museum; this is an American history institution,” Capt. Matthews says. “We feature black people, yes we do. History in America isn’t complete unless you tell the entire story.”

Capt. Matthews first learned of the Buffalo Soldiers in college. Reading a book for a class, he happened across a short paragraph about the Buffalo Soldiers, and he knew he had to tell the story of these men in their blue uniforms. “In military history, it’s not a popular topic,” Capt. Matthews explains. “We know about soldiers, but we don’t know about the Buffalo Soldiers.”

For first-time visitors, the museum serves as a connection to the past where they can get a sense of patriotism and pride. “I never even really knew about the Buffalo Soldiers,” college student Briana Moore exclaims. “Learning more about them really had me in awe.”

Schools teach African American history during February, and during those twenty-eight days, they do not always have enough time to cover the Buffalo Soldiers. The curriculum lacks the flexibility to really teach all African American history, which is why this museum is important. “Without the Buffalo Soldiers, the westward movement would have been delayed fifty years,” Capt. Matthews declares. “They built camps, forts, railroads, and chased down outlaws. That’s the contribution these men made.” The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum offers a way for people to learn about the dedication of these men and understand the significance of their hard work and the devotion required to fight for a country that did not show them respect.

A tour of the museum starts in the main lobby, where the visitor sees glass cases filled with pictures, statues, and mannequins in military fatigues. On a walk through a nearby hallway, paintings of the Buffalo Soldiers line the walls. Throughout the tour, personal stories go along with the pictures and enlistment documents. “People realize that they are standing on the contributions of people before them,” Capt. Matthews states. “They gain a better appreciation for these men.”

The stories told during a museum tour serve as a reminder of the Buffalo Soldiers’ hard work, dedication, and perseverance. Knowledge is not only gained in the classroom, as a day at the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum proves. The knowledge one gains there will motivate, inspire, and excite people of all ages.

The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum is located at 3816 Caroline at the corner of Alabama Street. It is open Monday through Friday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For more information, visit www.buffalosoldiersmuseum.com.

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News of the impending demolition of the Macy’s née Foley’s downtown building flooded newspapers, internet, and television in August 2013. News of the decision reaffirmed for many citizens that Houston continues to be a city striding toward its future with little regard for preservation of its past.

Protests to the rather expeditious decision concentrated less on the business rationale and more on the significance of personal and collective memories. Clearly, it was not Macy’s that people remembered—it was the Foley’s that had occupied two blocks at Main and Dallas. Many Houstonians fondly remembered the Christmas windows, the parades, the basement sales, the escalators, and the enveloping consumer experience. Other Houstonians remembered Foley’s as a significant symbol of segregation during the first half of the twentieth century and then a leader in the desegregation of downtown Houston during the early 1960s.

Foley’s downtown store was a symbol of the many meanings that Foley’s held for Houstonians—a symbol for Houston’s dramatic recovery after the Second World War, a symbol for the city’s expanding affluence during the latter half of the twentieth century, and a symbol for the transformation of Houston from a somewhat provincial town into an international center for business and commerce. Perhaps most of all, Foley’s downtown store was a symbol for the kind of management that blends keen business practices with genuine community engagement.

Although the Main Street store was a potent signifier for all manner of personal and collective memories, Foley’s was more to Houston than a single building. There were earlier stores and an array of later branch stores. Clearly none was as
When the United States entered World War II, Foley Bros. diverted advertising efforts to bond drives and other wartime services. All sales promotions were suspended during this time, and Foley’s supported an overseas canteen.

significant as the Main Street store, but all are part of the Foley’s legacy and part of Houston’s history.

Destruction of the downtown store need not mean that another chunk of Houston’s history lands in the dustbin. Indeed, the Foley’s Department Store Records endure in the Houston History Archives in the Special Collections Department of the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston, and archives can serve as a foundation for collective memory.1

Collective memory can also be defined as public memory, memory promoted and reinforced with public programming.2 To preserve the memory of all that Foley’s meant to Houston and to commemorate the public opening of the Foley’s archival collection, Houston History Archives mounted an exhibit in spring of 2011. Foley’s Department Store: Houston’s Community Partner, 1900-2005 opened on the first floor of the M. D. Anderson Library in four large windows devoted to themes of urban and suburban retail architecture, social action, community partnerships, and of course, retail amenities.

As Houstonians regret the loss of the Main Street Store, it is important to remember that it was preceded by several Foley’s stores, the first built by William L. Foley as a dry goods store at 214 Travis around 1889. He later trained James A. Foley and Pat C. Foley, and they opened their own store at 507 Main in 1900 – the first of the Foley’s department stores. Pat and James Foley moved three times, and by 1922, Foley’s was the largest department store in Houston.3

The exhibit photos housed permanently in the archival collection reveal the evolution of Foley’s downtown stores from the Foley Bros. early enterprises through every step of construction of Kenneth Franzheim’s pioneering 1947 design of the “store of tomorrow.” Construction began on a magnificent new $9,000,000 Foley’s store in 1946. Final construction costs totaled $13,000,000. Max Levine, vice president and general manager, told a crowd gathered to watch the ground breaking ceremony that “Houston is proud of Foley Bros. and Foley Bros. is proud of Houston.” Levine added that the new store would redeem Foley’s pledge to build in Houston the finest department store in the South. When Foley’s opened in 1947, it was the first complete department store built in the country since 1928. It was also a testament to Foley’s faith in Houston’s future.3

Newspaper and radio accounts of the Kenneth Franzheim’s architectural plans invited Houstonians to anticipate the grand opening where comfort and luxury would be the shopper’s companion. Plans included an air conditioning system that would saturate the building with cool, electronically filtered air during the summer months. Even during power failures fresh air would pour into the building through intakes in the building walls. Suspended heating pipes would ensure an even temperature throughout the building. The heating and air conditioning plants would be situated in the five-story garage and service building immediately west of the store, opposite Travis.

The new Foley’s was an architectural phenomenon that departed from traditional retail design. Design features included a pleasing combination of fluorescent and incandescent lights to illuminate the store. The curved vista on Main Street was the largest display window in the country. Escalators were wide enough to carry three people abreast. The design included a windowless exter-
or (except for the first floor display windows) to save on air conditioning costs.

Foley’s downtown was only one part of Foley’s architectural story and the archival collection preserves not only photos but also records of the step-by-step management decisions as Foley’s considered building branch stores. Sharpstown was the first branch store and a big step in Houston’s move toward suburbanization. Notably different in design from the Main Street store, the Sharpstown store was low (three stories) and broad and featured acres of parking, a characteristic of low density suburban development patterns common in the South after the Second World War. Before embarking on expansion with branch stores, Foley’s management closely studied transportation issues in Houston and surrounding areas. As the company selected sites for branches during the 1960s, management evaluated existing traffic patterns and requested improvements from the City of Houston, Harris County, and the Texas Highway Commission. The company also studied and asked for improvements in sanitary sewers, storm sewers, and waterlines in areas around proposed Foley’s stores. Records of the investigations and the management decisions are preserved in the Foley’s archival collection.

While aesthetic urban and suburban architecture were central to Foley’s retail management strategies, Foley’s owners and managers demonstrated a rare commitment to the people of Houston, a commitment that preceded the construction of the remarkable Main Street store. Houstonians recognized and rewarded Foley Bros. as a community partner and leader in social action throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

More than a retail business, Foley’s Department Store became a fixture of Houston’s community, offering philanthropy, employment, entertainment, and fashion. By 1927, Foley’s store included an auditorium that substituted for a civic center and served as a rehearsal hall for the Houston symphony. During the Bank Holiday...
of 1933, Foley’s replaced patrons’ personal checks with Foley’s checks which were accepted at stores around town. When the banks reopened and Foley’s deposited the personal checks, every check cleared.

A Foley’s vice president, along with other business leaders, created the Houston Fat Stock Show and Livestock Exposition and held the first show in 1932 in the Democratic Convention Hall. In 1938, event planners added the rodeo and parade, signaling the beginning of the Trail Ride Tradition. Foley’s remained a solid supporter of what became Houston’s biggest annual philanthropic event.

After the war, Foley’s became the “store of tomorrow” with the new building at 1100 Main Street, but the Franzheim building represented a continuation rather than a shift in Foley’s management philosophy of commitment to community. Combining the roles of community partner and retailer, Foley’s sold Girl Scout uniforms and camping equipment. Foley’s coordinated merchandise with the sale of Girl Scout cookies in February, the Girl Scout Birthday and Annual Council Meeting in March, and Girl Scout Week at the end of October. To promote the Girl Scouts and increase sales, Foley’s celebrated milestones with window displays and offered prizes to girls who visited stores during promotions.9

Another example of community participation was Foley’s sponsorship of a Little League team known as the Foley’s Texans. In addition to providing support for uniforms and participation in the Rotary Little League Baseball of Houston, Foley’s management encouraged Foley’s employees to attend games and support the team.6

In 1950 Foley’s sponsored Santa’s ride from Union Station to Foley’s. The following year, Santa’s ride became a full-fledged parade (Thanksgiving) that continued for forty-four years as an annual event attended by thousands of Houstonians and viewed on television by many others. Viewing Foley’s Christmas windows became another holiday tradition.7

Foley’s successfully combined retail strategies with community partnerships and social action. A most notable instance was the role Foley’s played in desegregating Houston. During the early 1960s, student activists from Texas Southern University (TSU) began efforts to desegregate downtown. First, the students targeted government facilities, but downtown Foley’s became a major target because of its central location (Main and Dallas) and its retail dominance. Several influences shaped Foley’s response. Student protests inside and outside the store worried Foley’s management, and pressure from Houston’s business community encouraged the store to avoid racial conflict. Desegregation of Foley’s succeeded because a coordinated news blackout averted anti-integration backlash.8

Uncomfortable with the protests at first, Foley’s management adapted quickly to welcome African American employees and customers, even participating in NAACP events. Potential new markets offset resistance to desegregation. Foley’s offered appliances to the “Negro Market” first, expecting a subsequent boost in apparel sales. Shortly following the Foley’s example, Houston hotels, movie theaters, public libraries, and golf courses desegregated. In 1970 women marched on The Men’s Grill at Foley’s commemorating fifty years of the right to vote – and suddenly the name changed to “The Grill” and women were welcomed as patrons.9

Foley’s management worked tirelessly to encourage interactive community participation, but...
Foley’s was an effective community partner because it was a successful business. Managers never forgot that their business was sales, and Foley’s offered a variety of consumer amenities. Shopping at Foley’s could be an all-encompassing experience. Inside the store with no windows beyond the first floor, one could shop, dine, rest, listen to music, visit the beauty salon, attend a fashion show, and have packages gift wrapped or sent to the garage for pick up later. Foley’s shoppers enjoyed something like a casino experience where no daylight distracted from every possible enjoyment.10

Foley’s worked to be first in opening the Houston fashion seasons. Paris fashion was an obvious favorite, but Edith Head’s Hollywood designs were also exhibited one year. For those who could not afford design originals and were handy with a needle, Foley’s sponsored “Les Belles de Paris” – A VOGUE Pattern Fashion Show. Foley’s fashion shows were often a feature of charitable social events such as those organized for the Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera, and Pin Oak Charity Horse Show. Foley’s Folio Board presented fashions and special programs for career women.

Many Houstonians remember Foley’s bridal department where consultants offered an array of advice and services, including wedding planning, invitation printing, trousseau selection, and photography. Consultants suggested options for reception menus and wedding etiquette, and other wedding events. Of course, Foley’s was a center for wedding dresses, offering varieties of lace, bodices, trains, and veils.11

Brides, student athletes, activists, shoppers, and other Houstonians possess memories of Foley’s. Loss of the building need not mean that Houston loses the memory of Foley’s. In fact, many of the features that made the building remarkable in 1947 were the same features that made the building challenging to re-purpose in the twenty-first century. Its size, windowless construction, plus the shift toward suburban demographics in which Foley’s played a lead role all contributed to the perceived need to redevelop the urban space and the retail concept.

It might be said that Foley’s captured the spirit of Houston more than any other single entity. Sports teams, NASA, bayous, magnolias all signified Houston to visitors, but Foley’s permeated every aspect of Houston’s interior culture. Construction and maintenance of collective memory must be an active process with both individual and collective activity: “Historians, artists, scientists, religious leaders, and philosophers all share responsibility for the cultural memory systems of their communities, creating, propagating, and perpetuating communal culture over time and across spatial boundaries.”12

Archives and museums are repositories for memory but do not infuse the community without active participation. Public programming invites such participation, and the Houston Heritage Society stepped up to engage the Houston community with memories of Foley’s by re-mounting the Houston History Archives exhibit from November 2012 to February 2013.

Foley’s archives are rich with the memories of Foley’s in Houston and preserve the documentation of a management style that respected and supported the community. Because the Foley’s Department Store Records are preserved and open to the public, memories of Foley’s will persist beyond the life of the Main Street building and beyond the lifetimes of those who personally experienced Foley’s as a community partner, benefited from Foley’s social action, and enjoyed the shopping.

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

HOUSTON HISTORY ARCHIVES

Acquisition of Foley’s Department Store Records

Collection includes 42 record cartons, 16 oversized boxes, 32 bound ledgers, and real estate records that are open to the public.

2006 – Proposal presented and accepted
2007 – Macy’s executed deed of gift
2007 – Records transferred to UH
2009 – Lasker Meyer begins book research
2011 – Records opened to public
2011-2012 – Harvard doctoral student researches labor; UT doctoral student researches transportation

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The campus-wide “Student Activities” page in the Student Life section of the University of Houston website reads, “Wherever your passions lie, you’re sure to find a match among UH’s 400+ organizations, fraternities, leadership programs and other groups.” Passion, defined by Merriam-Webster as a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something, obviously is alive and well at the University of Houston. Passion has long been a fixture at the university, dating back to its founding, and a passion to provide the university’s students the opportunity to develop all aspects of themselves is what inspired Lieutenant General Andrew Davis Bruce, just a few weeks after starting his term as the university’s third president, to note that the university was missing a fundamental institution—a campus chapel for student use. Fifty years after its opening, the A. D. Bruce Religion Center stands prominently in the center of the residential portion of campus, a symbol of the significant impact A. D. Bruce had and continues to have on the University of Houston.

Andrew Davis Bruce was born to John Logan Bruce and Martha Washington Smith in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 14, 1894. As a child, he moved with his family to Texas, where he later attended the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University) and earned a doctorate of laws in 1916. While at Texas A&M, he was a member of the Corps of Cadets, an experience that became the precursor to his long military career and the impetus for his joining the U.S. military in June 1917 as a second lieutenant in World War I.

Bruce’s military career began with him serving in the First Officer’s Training Camp at Leon Springs, Texas, and continued with his being sent into combat in France as part of the 2nd Infantry Division’s 5th Machine Gun Battalion. He participated in numerous battles in France before hiking with his division into Germany to be a part of the occupation force. In his first three years in the military, in addition to achieving the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel at the age of twenty-four, he earned a number of medals and commendations, including the Legion of Honor, three Croix de guerre medals, and the fourragère, all presented to him by the government of France, as well as the Distinguished Service Cross, which is the second highest military award presented to members of the U.S. Army.

Upon returning home in 1920, A. D. Bruce married Roberta Linnell Kennedy and moved to Bryan, Texas. Over the next two decades, he focused on raising his three...
children and incorporating his love of education into his continued service in the Army. He did this by teaching military science and tactics at Allen Academy in Bryan, serving with the 33rd Infantry in Panama, participating in historical work at the United States Army War College, and serving on the War Department general staff revising textbooks on military doctrine.4

It was also during this period that Bruce furthered his own education. He studied military tactics at the United States Army Infantry School, the United States Army Field Artillery School, the United States Army Command and General Staff College, the United States Army War College, and the United States Naval War College; he earned a master’s degree from Boston University.5

As World War II broke out, Bruce put his academic ambitions on hold and returned to the military full time. In 1942 he was tasked with organizing a new tank destroyer center, which he opened in Killeen, Texas, and named Fort Hood in honor of Civil War hero, General John Bell Hood. His involvement in the establishment of Fort Hood earned him a promotion to the rank of major general on September 9, 1942. In 1943 he was assigned to command the 77th Infantry Division, with which he led campaigns in Guam, the Ryuku islands, and in Leyte, an island in the Philippines. For his command of the 77th Infantry Division, the government of the Philippines awarded him the Philippine Liberation Medal and the Philippine Legion of Honor; he also received the United States Presidential Unit Citation. He gained notoriety in the military community for burying the body of Scripps Howard newspaper columnist Ernie Pyle after a sniper shot him while he was reporting on the war in the Pacific.6

Within his first few months as president, Bruce, who was referred to around campus as “The General” noticed that the university did not have a chapel for its students to practice their religion. He had seen the importance of having a chapel at almost all military institutions and considered religion an essential piece to a student’s full education. He commented to the director of religious activities, “Exclude religion entirely from education and you have no foundation upon which to build moral character.” Instituting a religious space on campus fell into Lt. Gen. Bruce’s plan to create the best students through the best form of education. In a speech to the Baytown Rotary Club, where he was advocating for state support of the university, he is recorded as saying, “We must have economic power, political power, social power, scientific power, psychological power, spiritual power – all based on sound education.”9

After the surrender of the Japanese, Bruce served as the military governor of the Japanese island of Hokkaidō before being assigned to command the 7th Infantry Division in Korea. Upon returning to the United States in October of 1947, his passion for education was incorporated into his assignments as he became the deputy army commander of the Fourth Army in Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, and later as the commandant of the Armed Forces Staff College, located in Norfolk, Virginia.7 His position in Virginia, which earned him a promotion to lieutenant general on July 30, 1951, was his last as he retired from the army after thirty-seven years on July 31, 1954. Upon his retirement, in addition to the medals he had received during the two world wars, he earned a Bronze Star Medal, an Air Medal, and the Purple Heart.

On June 16, 1954, the Board of Regents of the University of Houston appointed A. D. Bruce to be the third president of the university. They explained their choice of Lt. Gen. Bruce by describing him “as a top educator in the Armed Forces” and emphasizing his administrative talents. He replaced acting university president Charles Fleming McElhinney, who had served as the business manager of the university before being asked to take over for Dr. Walter W. Kemmerer, who had resigned to accept a key position with the proposed Houston World’s Fair.8

Within his first few months as president, Bruce, who was referred to around campus as “The General” noticed that the university did not have a chapel for its students to practice their religion. He had seen the importance of having a chapel at almost all military institutions and considered religion an essential piece to a student’s full education. He commented to the director of religious activities, “Exclude religion entirely from education and you have no foundation upon which to build moral character.” Instituting a religious space on campus fell into Lt. Gen. Bruce’s plan to create the best students through the best form of education. In a speech to the Baytown Rotary Club, where he was advocating for state support of the university, he is recorded as saying, “We must have economic power, political power, social power, scientific power, psychological power, spiritual power – all based on sound education.”9
While the campus lacked a chapel at the time The General arrived, religious organizations and institutions had long been interwoven into the fabric of the University of Houston. When the University of Houston (formerly the Houston Junior College) opened its doors for its first academic year in 1927, two of the founding twelve faculty members, H. F. Ander and Wallace E. Miner, were clergymen. Ander instructed biology in addition to serving Lutheran congregations around Houston and Miner had received a bachelor of divinity from Drew Theological Seminary before becoming an instructor in government and history.

The Baptist Student Union was chartered in 1936, becoming the university’s first religious organization, followed by the Catholic Club for Roman Catholic students in 1939. Once World War II began and the G.I. Bill was passed, religious organizations at the university began to multiply and develop as the number of students on campus increased. In 1946 and 1947 alone, The Canterbury Club for Episcopalian students, the Christian Science Organization, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, the Wesley Foundation for Methodist students, and the Westminster Fellowship for Presbyterian students were all established on campus. Together, they created the Religious Groups Council, founded “to coordinate the religious activities of the campus and to stimulate campus wide functions of religious nature.” Student participation and interest in campus religious activities started conversations among university administrators about the proposed construction of a religious activities building, which board members discussed at a meeting on September 15, 1948. Not until A. D. Bruce arrived on campus seven years later did the idea of a building for religious organizations and a chapel on campus return to the limelight.

A. D. Bruce and the Board of Regents began investigating interest in such a building from the various campus religious groups and were surprised to find mixed reactions to the proposal of a shared chapel. Many of the groups had already begun planning for off-campus buildings to serve students. In addition, each of the groups had individually expressed concerns over sharing religious space with groups of other religious denominations. Instead, they stated that they truly wanted new office space and areas for counseling and meetings. Taking their concerns into consideration, Bruce decided to continue discussions with the religious groups about developing a religious space on campus.

He encouraged support from each of the religious groups by proposing a “military solution.” He advocated for the model of the Armed Forces Base Chapel, where numerous faiths shared one chapel space, which was considered “neutral” when not in use by another group. He also pushed hard for each religion’s organization to accept the proposal for a building because plans for a chapel and religious center were already in the works at Rice Institute (now Rice University). On April 8, 1957, the Religious Groups Council met and decided to support
A. D. Bruce and the administration’s plans for a religious center and chapel. The university quickly took action to find an architect, and the Board of Regents selected Frank Dill to begin preliminary sketches that included a chapel, main lobby, lounge area, a director’s office, conference room, restrooms, storage and workroom, and sixteen rooms for religious organizations.

The next challenge was for the university to find the funds with which to build the religious center. Bruce formed the Religious Advisory Committee and worked with it to launch a fundraising campaign in the fall of 1958. Instead of calling upon the university’s normal pool of donors, Bruce and the committee decided to raise the funds by approaching Houston’s religious communities, which were aligned with the religious organizations on campus, to ask for funds and donations. However, the campaign that Bruce thought would be over fairly quickly was long and drawn out for several reasons. Funds had to be returned to organizations after pledges were not met, doubts arose about how long various organizations could stay in the new center, donors were slow to send money, and the various religious denominations disagreed about which artifacts, objects, and designs could or could not be included in the chapel design. Yet, five years after the initial blueprints were drawn, with all conflicts settled, and the final monies needed to begin construction coming from an anonymous donation of $85,000, construction began on the religious center and chapel in 1963.10

While the debates over the religious center were taking place, A. D. Bruce stayed busy working hard for the university. His storied military career immediately brought attention to UH, and the changes he brought to the institution brought notoriety and national recognition. He was appointed the first chancellor of the University of Houston System in December of 1956, and with his added title, he increased public knowledge about the university, which had the second largest student population of any university in the state with 13,000 students. He created the Board of Governors, and in 1959 it sought state support for the university, further increasing its prominence and ability to provide a quality education to its students.11 He also advocated for tax support for the university as well as strengthening the standards of the faculty and curriculum during his tenure as president and chancellor. Yet, when he retired from the chancellorship in 1961, construction had not even begun on the religion center.

Four years later, Bruce traveled from North Carolina, where he had moved after retiring, back to Houston to join dignitaries, clergy, faculty, students, and community members at the dedication ceremony of the University Religion Center that he had worked so hard to build. On August 5, 1969, the Board of Regents voted to change the name of the University Religion Center to the A. D. Bruce Center to honor The General after his death on July 28, 1969. The following October, the Religion Center Policy Board requested that the word “Religion” be included in the building’s name, and on December 3, the name officially became the A. D. Bruce Religion Center.12

Today, fifty years after the dedication of the A. D. Bruce Religion Center, anyone walking on campus might be surprised to find that much about the building remains the same. The chapel, built to service all religions and all denominations, is still full most evenings with students attending worship services of all varieties. Anyone roaming the halls will hear voices echoing out of the various rooms where each organization has its own dedicated space. Students barely notice that the building with the enormous glass windows nestled in the woods and surrounded by residential life was not even in existence fifty years ago.

The religion center represents “old world” values existing in an area of campus where almost everything is new. New dormitories and cafeterias have risen in recent years, some replacing older buildings and others as brand new additions. Even the Quadrangle, the oldest group of dormitories on campus, which surrounds the religion center, is scheduled to be torn down and rebuilt in the coming years. As the university continues to grow and more and more students make their home there, the number of students who make use of the religion center’s chapel and rooms continues to grow even as the center itself has not changed. In 2010, the religion center came under the auspices of the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services. Currently twenty-four religious organizations on campus are represented in the center’s spaces, with an ever-growing number of new religious organizations seeking ways to get involved every year.13

Rabbi Kenny Weiss, the executive director of Houston Hillel and the past president of the Campus Ministries Association, remarked, “The Campus Ministries Association enhances spiritual life on campus, but that is very anecdotal… because what it’s really about is affecting individuals.”14 Rabbi Weiss mentioned that one of the benefits of having a religion center on campus with all of the various religions represented is that more interfaith activities and dialogue are taking place, setting the stage for more individuals to get involved.
A. D. Bruce was adamant in his belief that the only way to successfully educate students was to add a focus on their moral character through spirituality. Rabbi Weiss echoes Lt. Gen. Bruce when talking about the purpose of a religion center on a college campus. “Universities are supposed to develop the entire student, not just teach them something that will then go on a diploma, and I think that spiritual life is a significant part of that for many students if not most students. And so it makes sense for the university to be able to address all aspects of the student’s life.”

Fifty years after the A. D. Bruce Religion Center was erected on campus, its original purpose still rings true through the efforts campus ministers are making to connect with students on an individual basis as well as through the interfaith interactions that the building promotes. With all of the expansion happening in and around the University of Houston, there is good reason to believe that in another fifty years, the A. D. Bruce Religion Center will still be nestled amongst the trees, offering students any spiritual connection they desire.

‡

Thank you...

Director of the Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative and editor of Houston History, Joe Pratt; founder and director of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, Captain Paul Matthews; with Distinguished UH Alumnus and Houston History supporter, Welcome Wilson Sr. at the spring launch party.

Houston History thanks Captain Paul Matthews and the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum for hosting the launch party for our spring issue, “Military Might.” Everyone had the opportunity to see the exhibits, watch a film on the Buffalo Soldiers and museum, and visit with Capt. Matthews and authors of the magazine articles. The museum outgrew its original space on Southmore (Houston History v.7 n.2) and moved into the Houston Light Guard Armory Building, a City of Houston Protected Landmark, on Veterans Day 2012. See the article on page 30 in this issue to learn more about the museum.

We are also grateful to our board members Betty Chapman and Anne Sloan, who provided food and set up the table service at the event, and to Susan Bischoff, Barbara Eaves, Bill Kellar, and Yolanda Black Navarro who contributed refreshments.
Energy Capitals: Local Impact, Global Influence, edited by Joseph A. Pratt, Martin V. Melosi, and Kathleen A. Brosnan (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014). Built on a National Science Foundation conference held at the University of Houston a few years ago, this book looks at the way fossil fuels have propelled industries and nations into the modern age and continue to influence economies and politics today – fuels that have proven to be mixed blessings. With case studies from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Norway, Africa, and Australia, this book visits older and more recent energy capitals, contrasts their evolutions, and explores why some influence global trends while others fail to control even their own destinies.

Exxon: Transforming Energy, 1973–2005, by Joseph A. Pratt with William E. Hale (University of Texas Press, 2013). ExxonMobil’s history stretches from the time of kerosene lamps to the era of jet travel, from the days of finding oil by searching for surface indications to the days of 3-D seismic, which uses powerful computers to create images of oil deep underground. Its learning curve was particularly steep in the years 1973–2005. This extensively researched volume demonstrates how Exxon’s core values and management enabled the company to adapt and succeed during a period of dramatic changes for the energy industry, remaining among the most profitable companies in the history of modern capitalism.

The History of Mirabeau B. Lamar High School, Houston, Texas 1937-2012, by Anne Sloan (2013). This 8.5” x 11” limited-edition volume chronicles the history of Lamar High School and the colorful characters that helped make it what it is today. The book contains 224 pages of interesting facts and stories about the school, complemented with 200 historical and modern photos of the campus, faculty, staff, students, and alumni who graced its halls. To order, contact the Lamar High School Alumni Association, at Lamarhsalumni@hotmail.com or call 713-522-5960, ext. 359.

Houston: Then and Now, by William Dylan Powell (Pavilion, 2014), pairs photos of local landmarks as they once looked alongside the same viewpoint photographed today. This updated volume illustrates Houston’s rich history and its modern development. A sampling of the sites include City Hall, the Harris County Courthouse, Allen’s Landing, San Jacinto Monument, Congress Avenue, Gulf Building, Moorish Federal Building, Carter’s Folly, Kress Building, Esperson Building, Antioch Church, Houston Light Guard Armory, Magnolia Brewery, Museum of Fine Arts, Hermann Park, Miller Outdoor Theatre, and others.

Julian Onderdonk in New York: The Lost Years, the Lost Paintings, by James Graham Baker (Texas State Historical Association, 2014). Onderdonk’s bluebonnets may have made him Texas’s best known artist, but his years in New York as a starving artist (literally) made him Onderdonk. Baker explores this often overlooked time and finds hundreds of paintings of landscapes and marine scenes – many done under pseudonyms – that not only helped the artist make ends meet but show that Onderdonk is more than a “bluebonnet painter.”

THE TEXAS TREASURE BUSINESS AWARD, administered by the Texas Historical Commission, recognizes Texas businesses that have contributed to the state’s growth and prosperity. Eligible businesses must have continuously operated in Texas for at least fifty years, continue to operate as an independent, for-profit Texas-owned business, and engage in the same or similar line of work. No fees; applications accepted at any time. Two Houston businesses currently display the Texas Treasure Business Award seal, Knapp Chevrolet and Houston Jewelry. Contact Trevia Wooster Beverly at the Harris County Historical Commission for information: treviawbeverly@comcast.net, 713-864-6862.

UNION PACIFIC GIVES $1 MILLION TO NAU CENTER – The Nau Center for Texas Cultural Heritage announced a $1 million gift from Union Pacific Railroad to create an interactive experience exhibit designed to celebrate the huge role the railroad industry has played and will play in the region’s economic success. The grant is the largest Union Pacific has ever made in Texas. Using locomotive Southern Pacific 982 as a stage, the Engines of Progress exhibit will bring the train to life as it prepares for departure, pulls into a station, or rockets across the Texas plains. The Nau Center will serve as a regional...
gateway for tourism with an interactive museum showcasing our rich history. The estimated $75 million facility, located between the George R. Brown Convention Center and Minute Maid Park, is slated for completion in the fourth quarter of 2016. Visit www.naucenter.org.

THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE WANTS YOUR MAPS!
Do you have a treasured collection of historic, original Texas maps, and you’re downsizing, and your children have no interest in your maps? Contact the Archives & Records at the Texas General Land Office. It holds 45,000 unique maps, sketches, and drawings documenting Texas, the American Southwest, and Mexico over 300 years. The GLO is committed to digitizing and placing its collection online, giving scholars everywhere access to them. For information, email mark.lambert@glo.texas.gov or call 512-463-5260.

THREE TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKERS DEDICATED – The Harris County Historical Commission recently marked three significant – and diverse – entities.

A. Jeff Kemp stands beside the marker acknowledging his father’s vast contribution to Texas history.

During extensive travels as an asphalt salesman and an executive of the Texas Company (Texaco), Louis Wiltz Kemp collected facts about early Texas and its people before putting those facts to work! Upon discovering that many notable Texans had unmarked or neglected graves, he arranged for the re-interment of over 100 individuals moved to the Texas State Cemetery. As chairman of the advisory board of Texas Historians for the 1936 Texas Centennial, he directed the placement of more than 1,100 markers, monuments, and buildings; he was instrumental in creating the San Jacinto Museum of History, and his summary of the battle is carved on the monument. He was an original member of the Texas Historical Commission, which put the marker in front of his home at 214 Westmoreland Avenue fifty-eight years after his death.

The Chinese Texans and Civil Rights marker at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, recognizes the struggle of Chinese immigrants to gain full civil rights. The first immigrants came to Texas during the 1870s, primarily to build railroads. In 1882, Congress restricted immigration with the Chinese Exclusion Act, which also denied citizenship to Chinese Americans. But Houston’s Chinese community grew as immigrants came from other southern states because their children could go to public schools and, later, state universities in Texas. In 1937, a proposed state law preventing Chinese citizens from owning urban property was struck down. Finally, in 1943, the Magnuson Act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act. Today, Chinese Americans have a significant impact on politics and culture throughout the state and nation.

The Eldorado Ballroom at 2310 Elgin opened in 1939, named for the social club to which the black community’s most prominent professionals and business people belonged. Some of the nation’s greatest African American
musicians performed there between the 1940s and 1970s, including Etta James and Ray Charles. The ballroom was donated to the nonprofit community arts and service organization Project Row Houses in 1999.

PEOPLE

Cary Wintz, distinguished professor of history at Texas Southern University, was named a 2014 Fellow of the Texas State Historical Association for excellence in Texas history research, teaching, and scholarship. Wintz, who has taught at TSU for over forty years, has published broadly on African American history and the Harlem Renaissance. He has served on or chaired virtually every TSHA committee.

Pam Gardner joins the Nau Center for Texas Cultural Heritage as executive project manager. She brings more than two decades of experience in business management and communications – most recently as president of business operations for the Houston Astros, where she was instrumental in the design and construction of Minute Maid Park. Chairman of Central Houston Inc. in 2012 and 2013, Gardner currently serves on its executive committee and board. She is on the board of the UH Hobby Center for Public Policy and Newfield Exploration, and chairs the Mayor’s Committee to End Chronic Homelessness in Houston.

Frank and Carol Holcomb received the San Jacinto Battleground Conservancy’s 2014 “Heroes of San Jacinto” award for their work showing the evolution of the New World, and especially Texas, through historical maps. “Using their collection of more than seventy-five documents, Frank and Carol can literally take visitors on a walk through Texas history using real maps from each period,” said Conservancy president Jan DeVault. Included in their collection are a 1513 Western Hemisphere map by the cartographer who named America after Amerigo Vespucci, a 1646 map showing California as an island, and several nineteenth-century maps showing Texas as part of Mexico, as a Republic, and as a state. Principal at Frank H. Holcomb, P.C., Frank specializes in tax issues and estate planning. Carol, who also works at the firm, has been a docent at Bayou Bend for twenty-three years.

AUG. 21: Authors Louis Aulbach and Linda Gorski discuss their book, Camp Logan – Houston’s World War I Emergency Training Center, at the Heritage Society’s Finger Lecture Series, 12:00-1:00 p.m. Free for members; $5 for visitors. Call 713-655-1912 for reservations.


THROUGH FEB. 2015: Texas Capitol Visitors Center hosts Texas Cattle Queens, an exhibit that tells the story of trail-blazing Texas women in the cattle business in the late nineteenth century – women who successfully took on “men’s work” wearing skirts and riding sidesaddle. These include such notables as Doña Maria del Carmen Calvillo, Molly Goodnight, Lizzie Johnson, and Amanda Burks.

Frank and Carol Holcomb

A rare photograph of two nineteenth-century women on horseback – and NOT riding sidesaddle!

Photo from Colorado County, 1910-1916, General Photograph Collection, courtesy University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

SEPT. 13: Park-to-Port Bike Ride. Both Hermann Park and the Houston Port Authority were founded in 1914. Now, thanks to the Hermann Park Conservancy, the Port of Houston Authority, the Houston Parks & Recreation Department, and many others, cyclists can pedal miles of trails linking “Park-to-Port.” Appropriately, bicyclists on September 13th will do just that – and slice a birthday cake to celebrate! Visit www.hermannpark.org.

SEPT. 13: Park-to-Port Bike Ride

A rare photograph of two nineteenth-century women on horseback – and NOT riding sidesaddle!

Photo from Colorado County, 1910-1916, General Photograph Collection, courtesy University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

SEPT. – JAN. 2015: Port of Houston — Stories of a Workforce: Celebrating the Centennial of the Houston Ship Channel, an exhibit at the Julia Ideson Library, explores the diverse culture and heritage of workers associated with the port and ship channel. Stories are told with photos and audio and video installations that focus on narratives, augmented with equipment, garments, work logs, and more. Interactive programs and digital technology will especially appeal to families and school audiences. Exhibit curators are Houston Arts Alliance and Houston Public Library.

SEPT. – JAN. 2015: Port of Houston — Stories of a Workforce: Celebrating the Centennial of the Houston Ship Channel

“Deckhands from Fiji finish rigging the gangway,” a part of the 2014 exhibition, Stories of a Workforce.

Photo courtesy of Lou Vest.

SEPT. 13: Park-to-Port Bike Ride

A rare photograph of two nineteenth-century women on horseback – and NOT riding sidesaddle!

Photo from Colorado County, 1910-1916, General Photograph Collection, courtesy University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

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OCT. 11: Houston: Born on the Bayou, Built on the Port, the Houston History Association’s annual conference,
celebrates 100 years of the Houston Ship Channel. 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Julia Ideson Library, 500 McKinney. The $50 registration includes lunch; discounts are available for teachers and students. Visit www.houstonhistoryassociation.org.

OCT. 18: Grand Opening of the McGovern Gardens and Cherie Flores Pavilion at Hermann Park. The McGovern Centennial Gardens, Hermann Park Conservancy’s largest improvement project, will feature a family garden, great lawn, 30’ garden mount, celebration garden, rose garden, and the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion. This free family-friendly celebration will include art projects, music, food, and performances.


NOV. 8: Houston History Book Fair. The annual History Book Fair, sponsored by Houston Arts and Media (HAM), will be held at the Julia Ideson Library downtown, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Dozens of Texas history authors will speak throughout the day. Free.

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14 McDougal, “Palm Center History Report.”
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4 Wagner Narrative History; Morrison & Fourny’s General Directory of the City of Houston 1920 (Houston: Morrison & Fourny Directory Co., 1920), 588.
5 1850 Census Harris County, Texas, U.S. Census Office, 1851; Scholastic Census, District 3 Rays Bayou Harris County 1854-55; “John Kuhlmann, History of Texas Together with a Biographical History of the Cities of Houston and Galveston (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1899), 508; Wagner Narrative History. At the time of John Kuhlmann’s death in 1883, his estate was valued at $100,000.
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13 Elouise Schmeltz Loonam, interview with author, April 26, 2014; “City Moves In on Farm,” The Houston Post, August 1, 1951.
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3 R. Elizabeth Stevens MacGregor, A Biographical Sketch by Charlotte Wilcox, n.d.; MacGregor vertical file, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library (hereinafter HMRC).
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15 Zina Garrison, Zina My Life in Women’s Tennis (Berkeley, CA: Frog, 2001), 5, 49.
17 Larry Thomas, interview by Steph McDougal, June 19, 2012, MPJTP.
18 John Wilkerson, interview by Steph McDougal, June 19, 2012, MPJTP.
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OVERSEER BRAZIEL
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