

Lest We Forget

By Joel Draut

Houston will become " ...beyond all doubt, the great interior commercial emporium of Texas." Thus bragged the Allen brothers in an August 1836 advertisement. Thirteen months later rains from a hurricane in September 1837 flooded the city's Main Street to a depth of four feet. This inundation did not deter the city from its predicted destiny - nor did any of the storms and floods that followed. The Weather Research Center, part of the John C. Freeman Weather Museum, lists just shy of 100 significant Houston area floods between 1837 and 1989. Nevertheless, people continue to move to the Bayou City. Whether through resilience or stubbornness, Houston is here to stay.

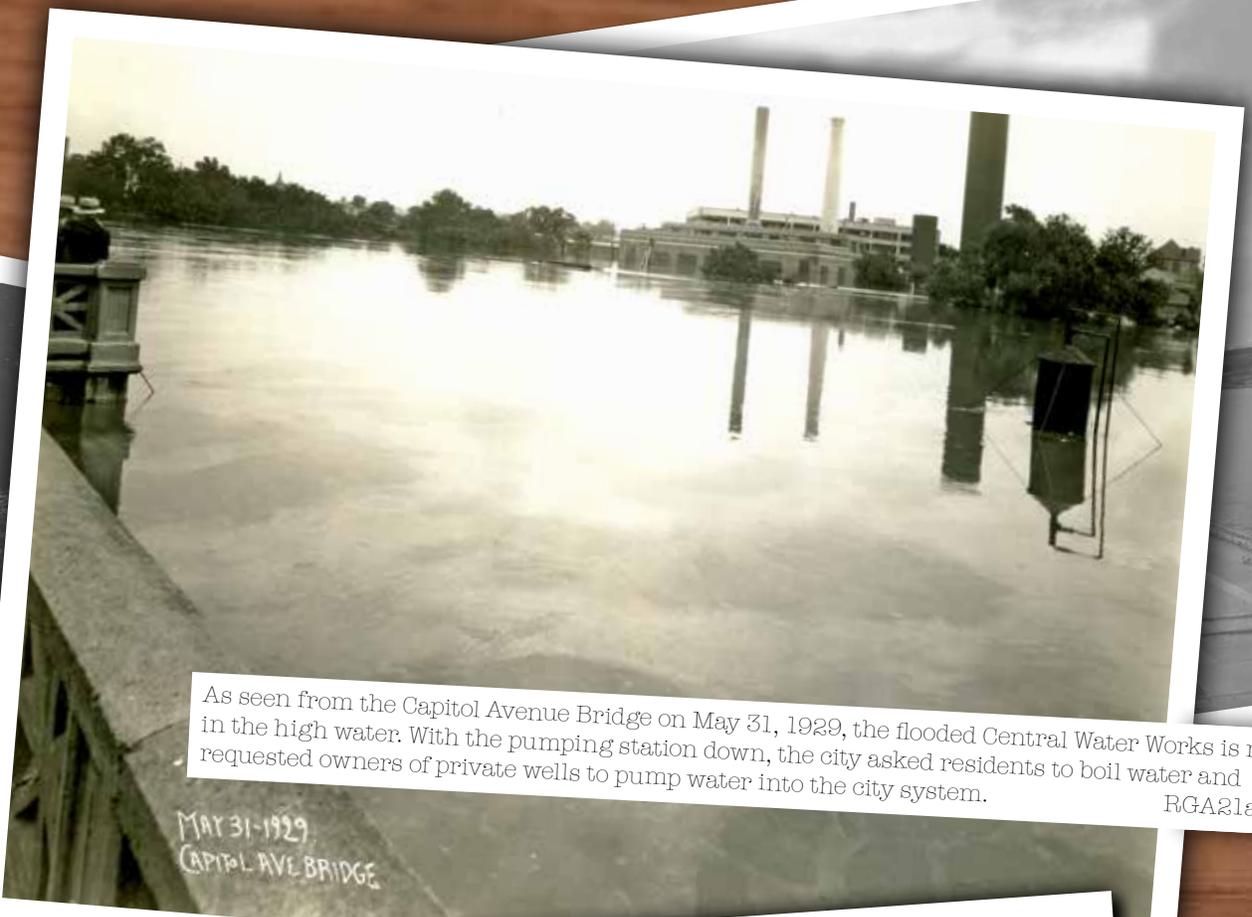
Houston photographers have chronicled some of the significant storms the city has endured and some of those photos have made their way into collections housed at the Houston Public Library's Houston Metropolitan Research Center. These images give perspective to Houston's latest flooding. Water-born grief is not new; it has woven itself into the fabric of Houston's history from the 1929 and 1935 floods that spurred creation of Addicks and Barker Reservoirs to the government-censored hurricane of 1943 that interrupted wartime production to 1961's Hurricane Carla that saw the City Auditorium pressed into service as a shelter. Houston reacts, recovers, and rebuilds.

Joel Draut has worked with the photographic archives at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center since 1998. He worked as a photographer at the *Houston Post* from 1977 until it closed in 1995.



Few people braved the swift flood currents of Buffalo Bayou as it coursed around the corner of Franklin and Milam during the Memorial Day Flood of 1929.

All photos courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGA21a-064.



As seen from the Capitol Avenue Bridge on May 31, 1929, the flooded Central Water Works is reflected in the high water. With the pumping station down, the city asked residents to boil water and requested owners of private wells to pump water into the city system.

RGA21a-060.

MAY 31-1929
CAPITOL AVE BRIDGE



The flooding around Waugh Drive and Buffalo Drive obscures the normal banks of Buffalo Bayou in this May 31, 1929, aerial photo. The large white building (bottom, center) surrounded by flood waters was the Sears and Roebuck store located on Buffalo Drive at Lincoln, now Allen Parkway at Montrose.

RGA21a-061





Looking south from Washington Avenue, just to the west of the Milam Street Bridge, the tremendous power of Houston's Great Flood of 1935 is apparent. The wide spread destruction plus seven flood-related deaths brought urgent calls for flood control measures, culminating in the Addicks and Barker Reservoirs. RGA21a-054.

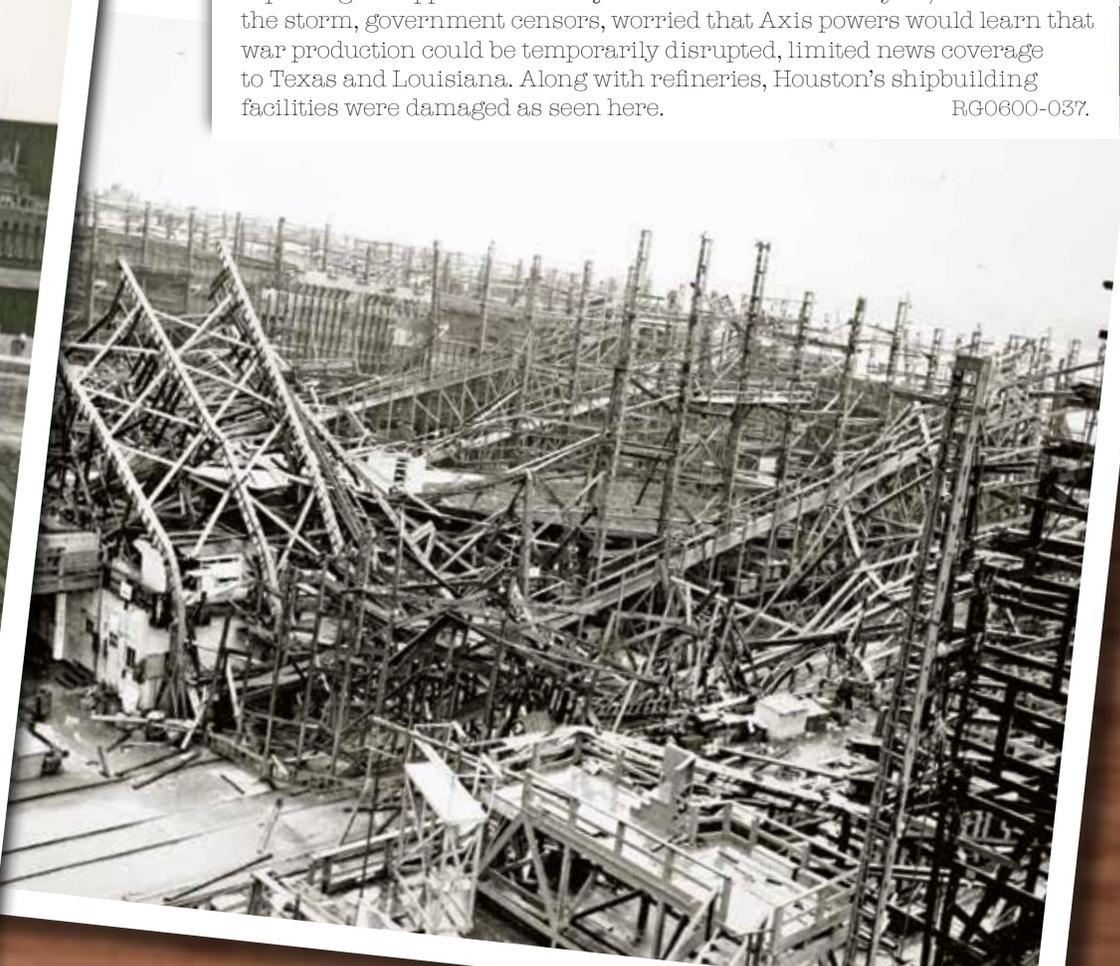


Looking north toward the Southern Pacific Station from the Preston Avenue Bridge, flood waters lap at the bottom of billboards. RGA21a-021.

A reported seven inches of rain brought the Brays and Kegans Bayous out of their banks, flooding about 100 homes on October 30, 1959. In true 1950s style, these people were evacuated in a power boat with tailfins.
RGD0006-1533.

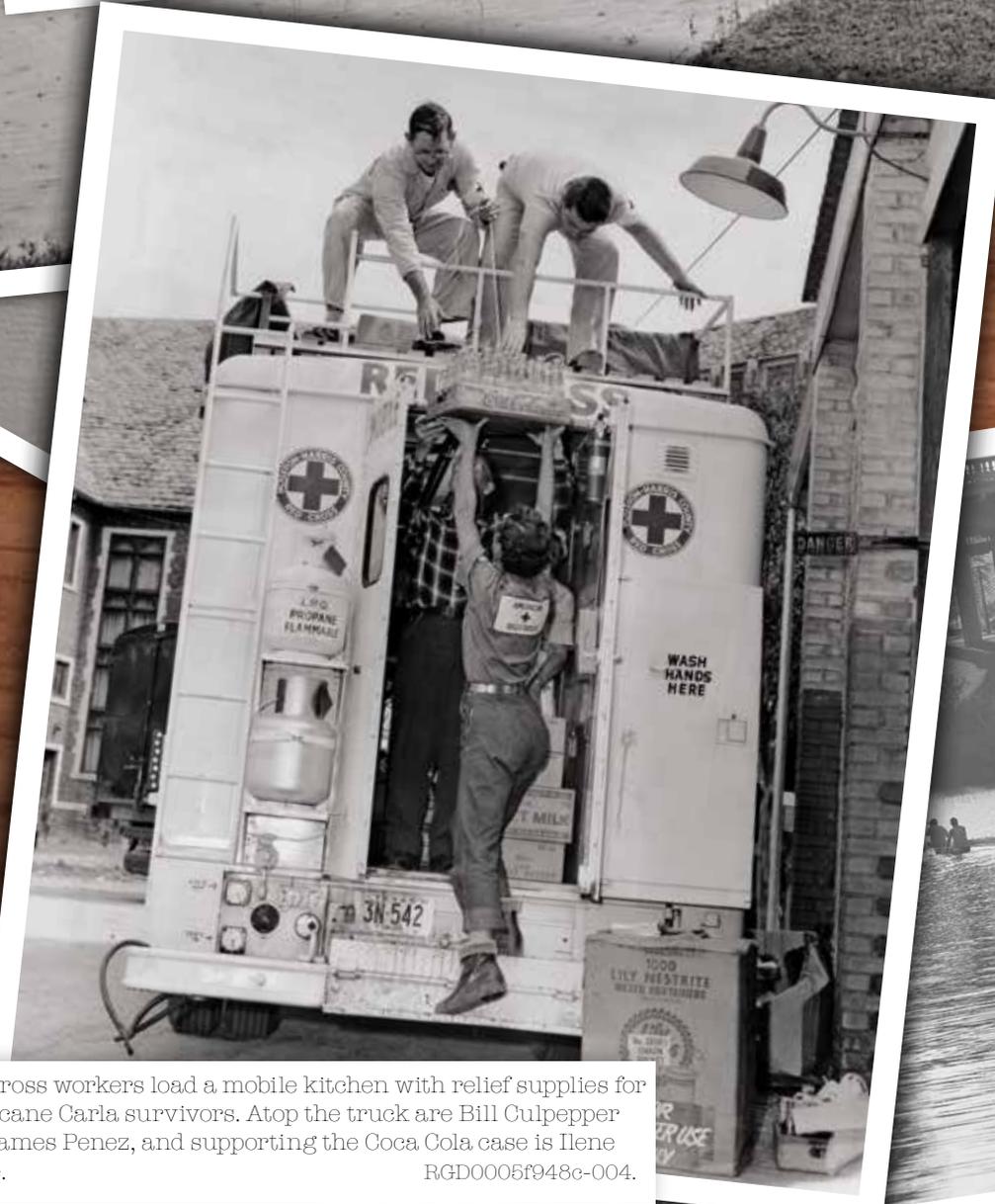


Fear of submarine attacks prevented ships in the Gulf of Mexico from reporting the approach of a major hurricane that hit July 27, 1943. After the storm, government censors, worried that Axis powers would learn that war production could be temporarily disrupted, limited news coverage to Texas and Louisiana. Along with refineries, Houston's shipbuilding facilities were damaged as seen here.
RG0600-037.





A tropical low dropped five to fifteen inches of rain, causing street flooding in the Sun Valley subdivision, south of Edgebrook and east of the Gulf Freeway, in late June of 1960. The event prompted neighborly visits and motorboat rides. RGD0006N-1960-1530.



Red Cross workers load a mobile kitchen with relief supplies for Hurricane Carla survivors. Atop the truck are Bill Culpepper and James Penez, and supporting the Coca Cola case is Ilene Shave. RGD0005f948c-004.



Houston opened the City Auditorium as a shelter for those displaced by Hurricane Carla, one of the strongest hurricanes ever recorded. They utilized all the available space, including the stage and the mat set up for professional wrestling (seen on left side).

RGD0005c-f948-002.



A couple and child are evacuated by small boat near the 13000 block of Homestead in north Houston when ten to fifteen inches of rain fell July 12 and 13, 1973. Sims, Greens, and Buffalo Bayous overflowed their banks.

RGD0006N-1973-0888-09.