

Houston HISTORY

VOLUME 9 • NUMBER 2 • SPRING 2012

Tickle Your Taste Buds



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UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**
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Blue Bell Memories



One of my earliest memories is the regal feeling of sitting on top of a hand-cranked freezer as my dad grinded away making homemade ice cream. The anticipation that grew during the long process of mixing and cranking enhanced the enjoyment of the final product, which was much better than the cheap mellorine my mom brought home from the grocery store.

Store-bought ice cream as good as home-made was unknown to me until I discovered Blue Bell sometime in my late teens.

Soon afterwards, I spent more than a decade wandering in the ice cream wilderness of Baltimore and Berkeley, pursuing a graduate education and a teaching career. Don't get me wrong, I ate my share of Breyer's and Dryer's without complaint, although regular trips back home to Texas reminded me of what I was missing. When I took a job at Texas A & M in 1981, we finally returned to Texas for good. We celebrated with bowls of Blue Bell, no doubt with background music from Willie Nelson. Life was good.

One problem, however, remained. My young daughter was an only child and she had me for a father. To put it mildly, I was deeply involved in her upbringing, and very demanding. When she was one year old, I wondered why she was not talking; at two years, why she could not yet hit a baseball. But as she approached four, I was greatly impressed by her ability to devour ice cream. Indeed, well before her first grade "placement tests," it was clear to me that she was "gifted and talented" in ice cream.

At about the same time, the local Safeway began having regular sales on Blue Bell, with bargains as low as five half gallons for \$10. As I read one of these ads, I had a vision of a new way forward, and I proclaimed boldly, "It's Ice Cream Day." My daughter immediately understood that whatever this meant, it was going to be good. We quickly

agreed on basic ground rules: All the Blue Bell you could eat in one day. No limit. As many flavors as you wanted. Without false modesty, I'll admit that it is the best idea I've ever had.

We went to the store, and each of us picked out two half gallons of our favorite flavors. We agreed that the fifth "neutral carton" would be Homemade Vanilla, which we both loved with strawberries or chocolate syrup. We then bagged our Blue Bell, drove home, and went to work. On and off for the rest of the day, we feasted. My wife did not follow our journey past the first bowl, but she shared our joy and laughed along with us as we listened to old rock and roll music and ate various flavors of ice cream. It quickly became clear that Blue Bell was meant to be savored, not gobbled down like hot dogs at a July Fourth eating contest. No, we did not finish the five half gallons. Indeed, by day's end, a family tradition had been established, yet plenty of ice cream remained. To avoid overworking our taste buds, we repeated this ritual only once or twice a year. We never got sick; our stomachs knew our limits even if our brains did not.

Ice Cream Day did not stop me from being a demanding parent. Along with other similar behavior, it did, however, suggest to my daughter that I was a natural-born goofball playing a very convincing role as an unreasonable dad. In retrospect, I even convinced myself that there was method in my goofiness. From the day my daughter was born, I felt a strong responsibility to be a serious parent who prepared her for adulthood in an often harsh, demanding world. I also believed that a healthy dose of whimsy was good for the soul. Reading this, my daughter, who survived my parenting and grew into an exceptional adult, no doubt will scoff at my effort to cast Ice Cream Day as part of a grand philosophy of child rearing. She will remember it, instead, as a creative excuse for pigging out on ice cream.

She now plays the role of a strict mom trying hard to limit her two-year old son's intake of sweets, including ice cream. Good luck to her on that one, especially with a whimsical grandpa around who recently bought her son his first pint of Blue Bell's amazing new Orange Swirl and no doubt soon will have a talk with him about family traditions.

Thank you!

All of us at *Houston History* want to thank City Council Members Edward Gonzalez, Melissa Noriega, and James Rodriguez, along with State Representatives Carol Alvarado and Jessica Farrar for sponsoring the fabulous launch party for last fall's issue, "Houston: Nuestra Historia." We also wish to express our appreciation to Yolanda Black Navarro and Lolita Guerrero of Sombreros for their hospitality and all the people who came out to celebrate the contributions of the Mexican American community to Houston's past.

Margo Wolanin, Yolanda Black Navarro, Dean John Roberts, Lolita Guerrero, and Council Member Melissa Noriega at the launch for "Houston: Nuestra Historia" at Sombreros on Navigation.

Photo courtesy of Shannon Buggs.



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Tickle Your Taste Buds

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Cover Photo: A two-year-old anticipates his next bite of Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla.

Photo courtesy of Kate Pratt.

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BLUE BELL: The Cream Rises to the Top

By Naveen Inampudi and Debbie Z. Harwell



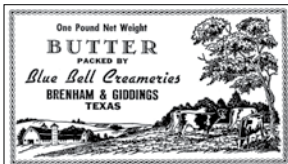
E. F. Kruse changed the name of the company to reflect the purity and freshness of his favorite wildflower.

Blue Bell inspires an image of caring good-natured workers who care for the community and those in it. Here, driver salesman Dave Smith greets Coty Koehne enjoying a Blue Bell Bullet in 1987.

All photos courtesy of Blue Bell Creameries, Brenham, Texas, unless otherwise noted.

104 years, eight managers, and one family turned a down-home creamery in Brenham, Texas, into one of the most respected companies in the region and the country. The name Blue Bell has become synonymous with ice cream, and the little creamery in Brenham now sets the gold standard for ice cream production while retaining the down-home feel that first made the creamery popular among folks in Central Texas. From the original hand-crank freezer to the state-of-the-art facilities today, Blue Bell incorporates the same personal service and care that it did when it started as the Brenham Creamery Company in 1907.

LEADERSHIP



A group of Brenham businessmen established the Brenham Creamery Company as a cooperative to produce sour cream butter and named H. C. Hodde as its manager the following year.

Hodde also wanted to make use of the sweet cream and, in 1911, decided to experiment with producing ice cream. *Blue Bell Ice Cream: A Century at the Little Creamery in Brenham, Texas 1907-2007* indicates, the “butter maker at the company laboriously hand-cranked a mixture of cream, sugar, and flavorings in a metal can surrounded by cracked ice and salt set inside a wooden tub.”¹ This process produced two gallons of ice cream delivered by horse and buggy to Brenham families who could consume it before it melted. The enthusiastic response led the directors to approve purchasing equipment that enabled them to produce 6,000 gallons of ice cream the following fiscal year.

Management changes and trying financial times led to difficulties for the creamery in the late 1910s. Hodde departed in 1916, and the company had several managers before the board of directors hired E. F. Kruse in 1919. Although the company minutes do not indicate specifically why the board chose E. F. Kruse, the current CEO and president Paul Kruse, Blue Bell historian Dorothy MacInerney, and public relations manager Bill Weiss all agree that the World War I veteran and college graduate had a “stellar reputation” that preceded him: “E.F. Kruse, being the youngest son of a respected local farming family had, no doubt, earned a reputation as an honest, hard-working individual. Life on the farm was not easy, and the children were generally required to take on chores and become a productive part of the working family at an early age. These requirements taught the value of hard work and responsibility and also built character”—all qualities that the board required to lead the company.²

Kruse, a teacher who was also offered the job as superintendent of the nearby Burton schools, evidently chose the creamery position because it “presented more of a challenge—and therefore, more opportu-

nity for reward.” This bond was perfect for both the company and the Kruse family.

In 1930, the company changed its name to Blue Bell Creameries after the wild flower which dots the summer Texas landscape. When E. F. Kruse passed away in 1951, his sons, Ed. and Howard Kruse, followed successively in his footsteps to run the company. Current CEO and president Paul Kruse is the third generation family member to head Blue Bell. Others currently at the creamery include cousins and Paul Kruse’s daughter, the fourth generation to join the Blue Bell team.

Paul Kruse shared some of his memories growing up in the Blue Bell family and working with his father and uncle:

When we were very young, we would go with our father to do a “plant check” on Sunday afternoons at the original creamery ... just a bunch of barefoot kids. We would get to stand on the conveyor belts but we couldn’t go into cold storage (which is where we really wanted to go). He told us our feet would stick to the floor. Needless to say, we don’t allow barefoot kids in the plant anymore.



One thing we absolutely hated as kids ... Dad would send us around the neighborhood in town to knock on doors to ask for old newspapers. We usually did a poor job. The whole family would go to the plant on Saturdays and wrap pieces of dry ice in the newspaper and then pack it into big green insulated Army bags along with packaged slices of ice cream. These went to Fort Hood in Killeen, and the ice cream was served to the troops out on maneuvers ... in the early 1960’s.³



Posing with Brenham Creamery employees in the early 1920s, E. F. Kruse, right, ran the company from 1919 until his death in 1951 and set the standards for which it is known today.

Paul Kruse worked at Blue Bell during high school and college. “I started in the production plant ‘sleeving’ ice cream and also manually palletizing ice cream. For a while I was one of the ‘stick guys’ at the original plant making sure we got a stick into every frozen novelty bar. I then worked in sales and hauled and cleaned freezer cabinets. One summer I ran a wholesale route and found it to be quite a challenge.”²⁴ No doubt this experience helped him to appreciate the hard work of his employees when he became chairman.

Ed. Kruse had always told his son, “Get your own business.” Taking that advice, Paul Kruse established a law practice in Brenham. When his father approached him about working for Blue Bell, Kruse recalls, “I told him no. . . . Several months later he asked me again, and I again told him no. He came back for a third try and said he was getting mad. I reminded him of his advice about getting my own business, and he replied that ‘he was probably wrong about that.’ . . . Later he said I was the hardest person to hire that he ever dealt with at Blue Bell.”²⁵

The leadership traditions handed down through the generations remain integral to Blue Bell’s success. Paul Kruse worked under both his father and his uncle, now in their eighties. They have influenced his decision-making, and he adds, “I have immense respect for their abilities and passion for ice cream.”²⁶ These traditions help explain why so many customers came to feel a passion for Blue Bell.

PRODUCTION AND QUALITY

Blue Bell’s sustained growth rested on two key policies: increasing and streamlining production, and maintaining product quality. During World War II, ice cream was not “top-notch” because many ingredients were hard to obtain. Blue Bell experimented with alternative sweeteners such as honey, syrup, and Karo syrup to make Frozette, but it did not compare to their ice cream. The 1950s, however, marked a new phase in ice cream consumption and Blue Bell’s future direction. Paul Kruse explained that “with the innovation of modern conveniences like in-home freezers, it became desirable for Ed. Kruse and Howard Kruse to upgrade the quality of ice cream.”²⁷

The commitment to quality never faltered as the company grew and added new products. For example, E. F. Kruse refused to produce mellorine, “a frozen dessert made very inexpensively from vegetable oil,” because he believed it was an inferior product. However, in 1952, his son Ed. Kruse successfully created a mellorine that “measured up” in flavor and matched the prices of competitors’ products. It remained popular into the 1960s and was a bargain at “\$1 for three or four half gallons.” Blue Bell began producing Slenderette in the 1960s, an innovation in low-calorie ice cream. In 1989, they responded to customers’ requests for products using Nutrasweet. These came in several flavors and were the nation’s first diet ice cream products in half-gallon containers.⁸

Howard Kruse helped move the production into new areas, and “delighted” in acquiring the latest machinery in the industry. Technology made Blue Bell more accessible



Jane Barnhill takes a tasty treat from a Blue Bell vending machine in Houston in 1961. Vending machines provided the boost that Blue Bell needed to grow into other cities and towns.

to customers. Marvin Giese serviced the vending accounts that turned attention to Blue Bell and caused people to ask for it by name. In 1961, a “boon to Houston sales” occurred when Blue Bell purchased ninety-one vending machines from Sun-Up Ice Cream Company and others from South Texas Vendors.⁹ This marked a huge step forward as John Barnhill, the Houston branch manager, had hoped. In 1965, Blue Bell installed its first Vitaline, which automated the manufacturing of frozen snacks. This step toward mass manufacturing allowed Blue Bell to expand to other parts of Texas.

Sales soared, and Blue Bell achieved \$1 million in gross revenues in 1962. By 1968, sales increased by thirty percent from the previous year. The production of ice cream continued to grow as technology developed, and by 1979, Blue Bell was producing ten million gallons of ice cream a year.¹⁰ Plant production again doubled in 1982 when Blue Bell made expansions to the production area of the main facility.¹¹ Although the Brenham creamery remains the only one making all the Blue Bell products, the company has plants in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and Sylacauga, Alabama. In 1989, Blue Bell began selling in Oklahoma and Louisiana. During the 1990s, Kansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee were added to their territory; and in the last decade, ice cream lovers in all or parts of North Carolina, Arizona, Kentucky, Florida, Virginia, Missouri, Indiana, Wyoming, and Colorado began seeing Blue Bell in store freezers.

Blue Bell’s emphasis on the cleanliness of its facilities demonstrated its commitment to premium quality. At the end of each day, “Blue Bell employees break down the plant



A tourist's view of the Blue Bell packaging process demonstrates how each employee takes part in the production process.

equipment completely and clean each piece thoroughly.” This process, which takes several hours, involves “rinsing each part in very hot water supplied directly from boilers at Blue Bell.” The employees then use a cleaning solution to scrub each piece of the equipment before rinsing it thoroughly. At that point the equipment is sanitized.¹² The process insures consumers receive the best-tasting ice cream, which they can eat with confidence.

Even with its attention to technology and quality, Blue Bell likely could not have become the South's leading ice cream producer without the “Driver Salesman.” Originally



Shown painting an ad on a storefront window in 1999, John Barnhill joined Blue Bell in 1960 and rose up the ranks. One of his greatest contributions was the marketing strategy emphasizing that Blue Bell made the best ice cream because it came from the “Little Creamery in Brenham.”

called route salesmen, the driver salesmen often begin their day as early as 2:00 a.m. to insure their products are fresh. They travel to all the areas Blue Bell services, making sure each store is fully stocked.¹³

With concern for the environment, Blue Bell recycles as many things as possible—including banana peels used in desserts like Banana Pudding Ice Cream and Fudge Bombstiks. This led to a surprising discovery as told in *Blue Bell Ice Cream: A Century at the Little Creamery in Brenham, Texas*:

“Doug Middleton, manager of the ingredients processing department, took the time to transport each day's banana peels to a piece of property where he'd bury them in the compost heap. One day he was in a hurry and just dumped the peels – intending to bury them the next day. However, when he returned, all the banana peels were gone. The same set of events occurred the following day. On the third day, when Doug drove up to the compost site, thirty cows came running to his truck. The cows loved eating the banana peels! Blue Bell now has a chute that goes directly from the banana-peeling station to a truck that delivers banana peels to Brenham farmers for their delighted cows.”¹⁵

FLAVORS

Over the years, Blue Bell's commitment to providing great products led to the introduction of some interesting flavors; many became successes, but some failed. A few ideas that did not take off included Dill Pickle 'n Cream, a green ice cream with bits of pickle chips in it; Purple Fink Bar, a raspberry ice cream that left the consumer's mouth purple; Peanut Butter; and Macadamia. The successes, however, far outweigh the occasional miscue.

Howard Kruse developed the most popular flavor of Blue Bell ice cream. In 1967, he began contemplating how



Employees like Lee Dell Krause filled cartons manually for years after the facility made technological improvements. This required “almost a juggling motion as an empty carton was placed under the one being filled by a stream of ice cream.” She then passed the full carton to the next person for sealing and moved the empty carton under the nozzle (all without spilling!).

to replicate the flavor of hand-cranked homemade vanilla ice cream. Though it may seem simple enough, duplicating that unique flavor was not easy. Howard Kruse struggled for nearly a year, before he “hit upon the right combination of texture and flavor” and “tentatively” asked Ed. to test it. Thanks to Howard’s perseverance, customers can now enjoy the original homemade vanilla ice cream for which Blue Bell is famous. When the company began producing Homemade Vanilla in 1969, “cartons flew out of the grocery store freezers,” and it continues to be Blue Bell’s biggest seller.¹⁶

In terms of knowing flavors, no one can beat Blue Bell’s taste testers. Though anyone who works there can become a taste tester, the best of the best can differentiate subtle differences. “These experts easily distinguish between Milk Chocolate mix and Dutch Chocolate mix, Homemade Vanilla mix and French Vanilla mix,” Blue Bell explains. “More sophisticated palates” are crucial in discerning the best milk and cream when fresh dairy products arrive from the farms. Taste testers play a role in every stage of the production process from the beginning to the end, and they ensure that every “flavor meets Blue

Bell’s high standards of excellence in every aspect.”¹⁷

Regional and rotational flavors emerged that helped Blue Bell maintain community ties at its production points. Dos Amigos, Tres Leches, Dulce de Leche, and Buñuelos are some of the regional creations popular in the Houston area that became rotational flavors throughout Blue Bell’s routes. The company introduced Key Lime Pie ice cream in Florida, and the flavor “proved so popular” that Blue Bell offered that “little bit of Florida” to other regions and made it a rotational flavor for the whole company.¹⁸ Rotational flavors come out at certain times of the year. Often these coincide with harvests, for example, to ensure the freshest ingredients.

Blue Bell takes pride in allowing consumers and employees to suggest new flavors. The company conducted a “Taste of the Country Flavor Contest” to celebrate its 100th birthday in 2007. Mary Jane Hegley of Charleston, South Carolina, won the grand-prize for “Southern Hospitality,” which has a Homemade Vanilla base enhanced with pineapples, pecans, and a strawberry sauce. Blue Bell customers also submit flavors, and “on a certain date each year, the new-flavor candidates are reviewed, and employees help to decide which ones will appear in grocers’ freezers the next year.”¹⁹ This allows both consumers and employees to take part in the creative process.

COMMUNITY

Over the years, Blue Bell has moved from a simple small-town creamery to the third largest ice cream provider in the country. Yet it has retained the small-town feel by keeping the employees and consumers involved. Paul Kruse noted, “Historically, Blue Bell has always tried to be a good partner in ways that benefit the communities we are in. Sometimes we find that we can be of help in ways we would have never thought of until an event takes place.”²⁰

No truer example could illustrate that point than the story of a young woman who was found at the Grand Canyon

Copy of post card found in Iraq by Jim Boyd in 2004 that reminded him of home, and Texas, and going to the store to buy Blue Bell.

Photo courtesy of Richard Korczynski of Victoria, Texas, and Blue Bell Creameries.



in 1991 with no memory of who she was, where she was from, or how she got there. She only mentioned three things to the sheriff: Delchamps, a grocery chain in the Southeast; a river; and the slogan, “Blue Bell. The best ice cream in the Country.” The sheriff called the creamery, and the Blue Bell representative determined the company serviced Delchamps in East Texas and western Louisiana, which were divided by the Sabine River. Area television stations ran the story, which the woman’s parents saw and brought their daughter home.²¹

Blue Bell has provided cold treats and ice to rescue workers and offered its trucks for cold storage and transporting supplies following natural disasters. For example, with Brenham on a Gulf Coast evacuation route, Blue Bell along with an electric cooperative provided fresh water to relieve stranded travelers during the evacuation for Hurricane Rita. After the storm blew through, Texas Rangers in Beaumont asked for a refrigerated truck for ice, and within an hour, Blue Bell’s Beaumont branch had one on the way.²²

Blue Bell has helped in other ways as well. After Hurricane Katrina, Plaquemines Parish, south of New Orleans, contacted the Slidell Blue Bell branch to help salvage its flooded court records. To prevent mold, “The solution was to freeze the records very quickly and then get them to a place that freeze dries and restores them.” Blue Bell loaded the documents, froze them, and through “a lot of coordinated effort” helped save the historical records.²³ In another incident, the director of the Star of Republic Museum contacted Paul Kruse to help with an “insect infestation in a stuffed buffalo.” It seemed the bugs could be killed by freezing, then thawing, and refreezing the buffalo. Kruse offered the museum an old refrigerator truck to solve the problem. As a result of these many efforts to be a community partner, Blue Bell has become a favorite for more than just its ice cream wherever it has expanded.

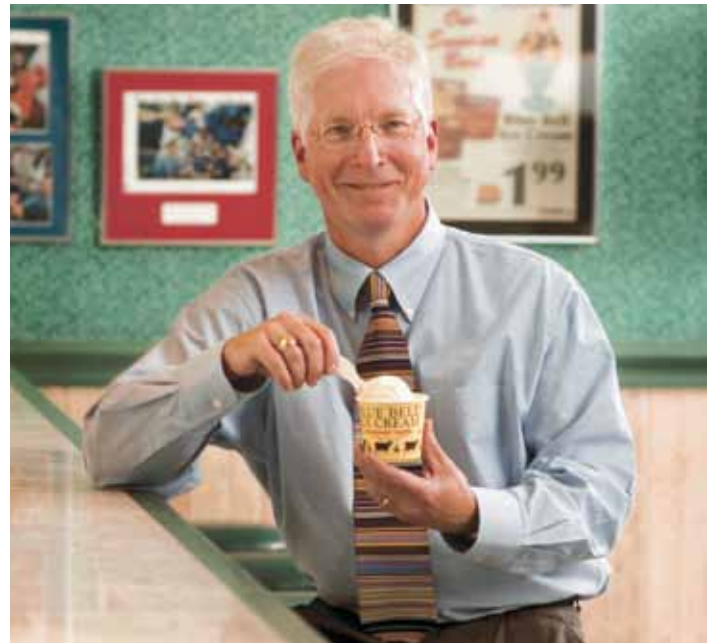
How Blue Bell handles its correspondence illustrates another way it maintains its down-home atmosphere and stays connected to communities. Last year Blue Bell received approximately 4,000 phone calls and letters with a typical day bringing in between ten and forty letters.²⁴ Even though he has many responsibilities, Paul Kruse responds to each letter personally, epitomizing the commitment of the Kruse family to the ideals on which the little creamery in Brenham was founded.

The letters cover many subjects, from suggestions for new flavors to requests to start selling ice cream in new areas. Some of the letters contain surprises, such as the one the company received from someone who had been playing video games with a friend when a tornado siren sounded. The friend dashed off and returned with two spoons and a carton of Dutch Chocolate, which they ate sitting in the bathtub during the tornado.²⁵

Many write in to tell Blue Bell how much its ice cream means to them, such as a letter received in June 2004 from Jim Boyd, AFCAP Ranger in the U.S. Air Force. He found a post card buried in the sand at Camp Taji, Iraq, featuring “a pint container of Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream filled with bluebonnets and the Lone Star flag in the background” with a note that read, “Wish we could send you a case of cool ice cream. Don’t think it will make the trip.


Take care and we look forward to your return.” Boyd, who kept the card near his bunk, wrote to Blue Bell: “It is hard to put into words the way I felt when I found this postcard from my great home state of Texas. It was lying on the ground in an area totally destroyed by our bombs. ... Each time I looked at the card I was reminded of home and Texas and what it would be like to go to the food store in Austin and buy some Blue Bell Ice Cream. ... I had mixed feelings of being happy and homesick at the same time, but mostly happy.”²⁶

When asked about the impact of the letters, Paul Kruse wrote, “We are always amazed of how our products are embraced by our consumers. It really humbles us to know that people take such pride in our products, as if they made it themselves ... they become ambassadors for us. Also, we’re reminded that they associate Blue Bell with special times



Going from a “stick guy” making novelty bars to Blue Bell CEO and president, Paul Kruse has followed in his grandfather’s, father’s, and uncle’s footsteps, sharing their passion for ice cream and the little creamery in Brenham.

and memories in their lives. Ex: birthday parties, celebrations and just about any sort of special event is usually a good time for ice cream. We just feel privileged that they pick Blue Bell because we know that there are other choices they could make. The loyalty of our consumers only makes us want to work harder to maintain the same quality going forward, and continue to find ways to improve what we do.”

With Blue Bell, the cream has truly risen to the top. Blue Bell is currently finishing up a complete remodeling of the tour and visitors center in Brenham. More new flavors are on the way. As Paul Kruse said, “The fun continues.”²⁷ 

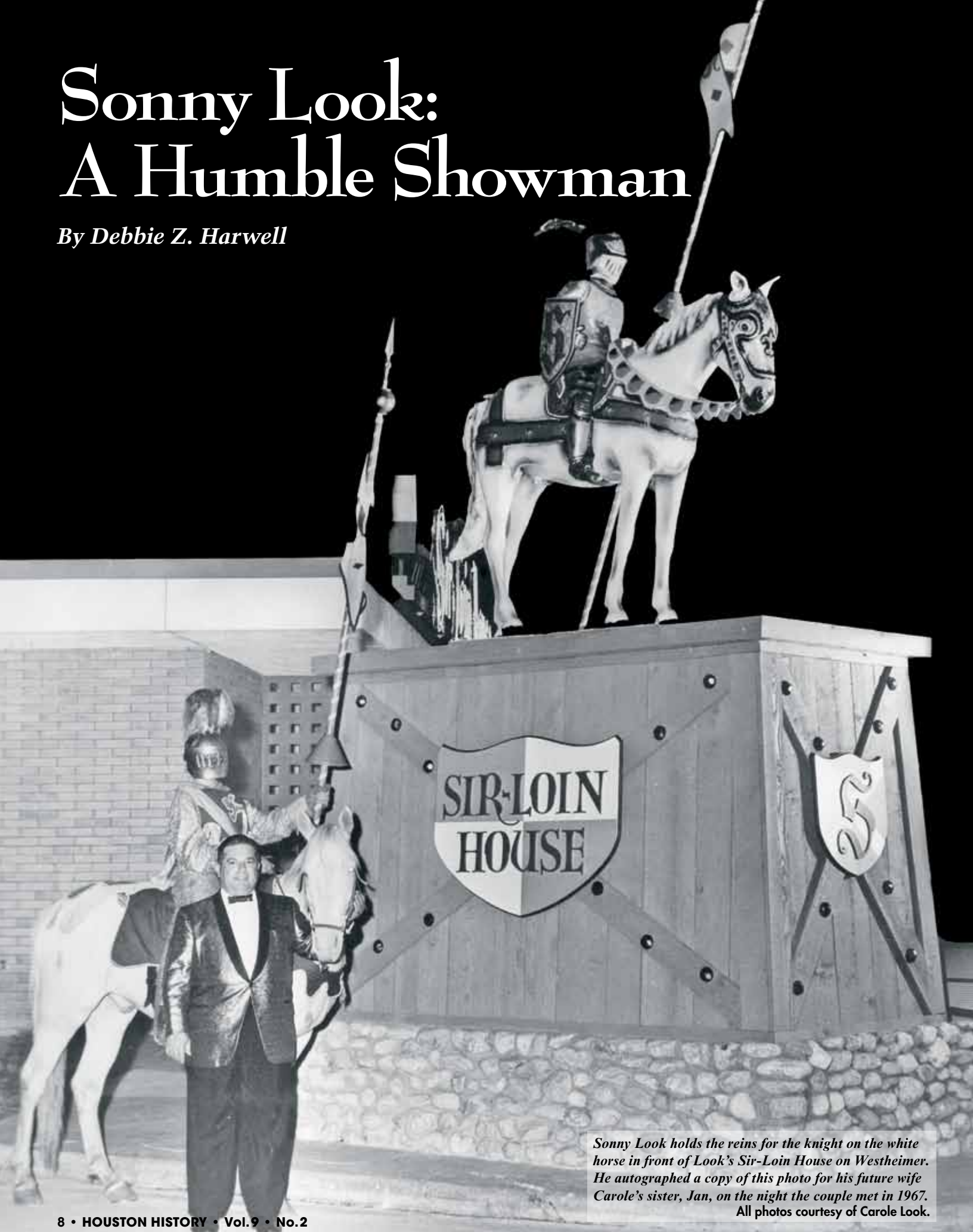
For tour information, recipes, and more, visit www.bluebell.com.

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Sonny Look: A Humble Showman

By Debbie Z. Harwell



Sonny Look holds the reins for the knight on the white horse in front of Look's Sir-Loin House on Westheimer. He autographed a copy of this photo for his future wife Carole's sister, Jan, on the night the couple met in 1967.

All photos courtesy of Carole Look.

I will never forget the first time I saw Sonny Look. My family went to Look's Sir-Loin House to celebrate a special occasion in 1960, a time before eating out was common or Houston had become a national restaurant capital. Not long after the hostess seated us, a man approached our table, a larger-than-life kind of guy wearing a red brocade jacket. He was incredibly friendly and spoke to all of us—even me, an eight-year-old—as if we were the most important customers who ever walked in the door. I loved the four different flavors of butter, especially the honey butter. My parents raved about the steaks, and my dad appreciated the complimentary glass of wine Look offered to the adults. Since Texas law still prohibited liquor by the drink except in private clubs, that free glass of wine had tremendous appeal!

Look won us over on that first visit, and we celebrated many special occasions and just ordinary days at his restaurants over the years because you could always depend on a first-class experience. Little did I know then what the future held. Twenty years later, my husband, Tom Harwell, went to work for Sonny at Sunbelt Hotels, and he and his wife, Carole, became our dear friends. Recently Carole sat down with me to share memories of this Houston hospitality legend.¹

Garret Dawson “Sonny” Look was born on April 21, 1919, in Caldwell, Texas, the oldest of four children. He attended Brenham High School and at age fourteen took a job at the New York Café on Main Street in Brenham, just off the town square. He held every position from busboy to manager, and at age twenty-one, bought the café from the owner. Uncommon for a small town, the menu included Alaskan salmon, oysters, flounder, veal, seven different cuts of beef, and a wide array of appetizers and sides.

Sonny married Mary Reynolds of Brenham and, in 1942, enlisted in the Navy as a ship's cook 1st class. He sold the café to the owner of a cab company with a “gentleman's agreement” that Look could buy it back when he returned. He served on the USS *Beagle* in the Pacific until 1945. When he came back to Brenham, the owner refused to sell, so Sonny packed up Mary and their son Gary, who was born in 1944, and moved to Houston, which offered greater opportunities.

Look first sold sandwiches for a tavern on Riesner Street, but after six months the owner told Look he was too good for the establishment. From 1946 to 1948, he operated the Quitman Coffee Shop, which had twenty-five seats and a counter. A year later, he leased the former Lark Restaurant at 715 Quitman and changed the name to Sonny Look's. Greg Ortale, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau (GHCVB) reminisced, “The stories are legendary . . . People would come in and order off the menu, when he first started . . . then he would run next door to the store to buy it and then come back and cook it.”² Sonny Look's started with forty-six seats and grew to 229 seats. In 1950, Look added a building with a larger pit than the Quitman location to take care of the bar-b-q and catering business. The catering operation serviced groups ranging from ten to 9,000 guests. He had seven trucks and two twenty-seven-foot trailers with bar-b-q pits, and rented more when needed.

Mary worked side by side with Sonny primarily as the cashier and office manager until her death from cancer in 1964. Gary Look remembers his parents working “very hard, seven days a week and holidays to build the restaurant and reputation they had. They seldom took a vacation.” To spend more time with them, Gary would go to the restaurant where he helped out doing a variety of different jobs.³

In 1959, Look moved to the “outskirts of town.” He opened Look's Sir-Loin House with 472 seats at 6112

Westheimer in the Briargrove Shopping Center.⁴ It was here that Sonny began wearing the flamboyant jackets made by his tailor and friend Frank Ortiz of Galveston. People went crazy for them! At one point, he had four restaurants and kept coats at all of them. Carole recalled, “When he would go from restaurant to restaurant, he would change his coat. He would tell people, ‘If you see me in this coat twice in one night, the coat's yours.’”

Carole met Sonny on March 31, 1967, when she and her family dined at the Sir-Loin House to celebrate her mother's birthday. After finding out Carole was a new Houstonian, Sonny invited them to the club for a drink (he had coffee; he never drank with the customers). It took him three months to convince Carole to go out with him despite a shared interest in horseback riding. They spent a lot of time together, and one day Carole realized she loved him—“What's not to love about Sonny?” she asked. They married a year later and had a daughter, Elizabeth, in 1972.

In April 1967, Look opened his premiere restaurant, Look's Sir-Loin Inn at 9810 South Main near the Astrodome. The 37,000 square foot facility had 1,400 seats on one floor. It was the largest free-standing eatery in Texas and the third largest in the country.

The Look legend had it that beef off the loin of a grain-fed steer so impressed England's King Henry VIII that he knighted the steak “Sir-Loin.” The Look steakhouses took

*“The harder you work,
the luckier you get.”*

— Sonny Look



Sonny Look immediately recognized that the bright jackets were a conversation piece. They continue to represent a signature of both the man and the restaurant.



The railroad-themed Look's Depot downtown on Market Square operated from 1971 to 1978. Filled with railroad memorabilia, it had 325 seats on three floors. A crane carried the 88-foot Santa Fe dining car through downtown on Sunday, July 16, 1972, and hoisted it into place. Look remodeled it for use as a cocktail lounge.

their English theme from this story and were famous for the knight on a white horse standing guard outside. Look had four white horses. Two worked in town, and two vacationed in the country; they would switch places every two weeks. The horses stabled in Greenridge near the Sir-Loin House. One walked to the Westheimer location, and the other traveled to South Main in a trailer.

Look owned all of his restaurants independently except for five bar-b-q barns he owned with partners. He continued to do business on a handshake throughout his long career. Ortale called him “a true Texan,” adding, “his handshake was all you needed.”⁵

Look's favorite restaurant story involved a close friend and frequent customer who stopped by the Sir-Loin House to pick up a box of steaks to take home to cook. Leaving in a hurry, he did not notice that he drove off in the wrong car. It looked just like his car, and the keys were in it, so off he went. The car's real owner was not happy to discover the mistake. In the meantime, the customer had not gone home. He was grilling the steaks somewhere else when his wife called looking for him. Sonny's moral to the story: “a good restaurateur never tells all he knows.”

Look found it interesting to observe how food trends changed. When he was pouring customers a free glass of his private-label rosé by Tavel, it was *the* wine. Rosé joined a list of French and German wines that were the “best”—Burgundy, Bordeaux, Chablis, Riesling, and Liebfraumilch (Blue Nun). Although California produced a few quality wines, they were not widely recognized until the late 1970s. Americans were fine-tuning their pallets. Look and the Petroleum Club's manager, Erik Worscheh, led the way in educating Houstonians about wine.⁶

In 1967, Look partnered in his first hotel, a Ramada Inn on South Main, when a friend, Bruce Weaver, Sr., asked him to invest. The two men went on to build or buy ten more hotels, some with other investors. Originally called Texas Interstate Ramadas, their company became Sunbelt Hotels in 1979 to better reflect the company's growth, which

included Hiltons at Hobby Airport, Beaumont, College Station, and Wichita Falls, along with properties that Sunbelt managed for other owners. Wayne Chappell, vice president of tradeshow relations for the GHCVB, called Look a “frontrunner” doing “visionary things” such as putting penthouse suites in his hotels that boasted full-size hot tubs and mirrors on the ceiling of the master bedroom.⁷

Look put his food and beverage expertise to work at the hotels. They featured notable restaurants like The Bridge in Ramada West on the Katy Freeway, and clubs like the Library Club at Ramada North and Sundance in the Beaumont Hilton, which alone netted over \$1 million a year. All of Sunbelt's hotels received numerous national awards. They had live entertainment, top-ranked dining facilities, and full ballrooms where they often served as many as 1,200 to 1,500 customers for holiday buffets.

Chappell noted, Look “was a big thinker, and he looked at the big picture.” Worscheh, credited him with bringing the concept of dining out to Houston and being instrumental in starting the Houston Restaurant Association (HRA) and the Texas Restaurant Association (TRA). He also served on the board of the national association.⁸ National chain restaurants had not yet gained a following, and certainly Houston did not offer that as an option. Carole recalled that whenever new restaurateurs came to town, Look impressed upon them that they had to join the HRA, TRA, and Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo if they wanted to get anywhere.

Sonny Look tirelessly promoted Houston and Texas as destinations, co-founding the Greater Houston Convention and Visitor's Council (GHVCV).⁹ From 1954, the Houston Chamber of Commerce had a convention committee with one person responsible for booking city conventions. In 1962, a group of local businessmen met at the Rice Hotel to discuss raising money to fund a convention and visitors council. They agreed to personally fund the council staff and hired Chester Wilkins of Chicago to run it. Look served as chairman of the board for the council from 1980 to 1982 and was named a lifetime director in 1983.



In February 1981, members of the GHCVC donned their boots and hats and traveled to Paris, France, to solicit convention and tourist business for Houston. Left to right: Phil Robertson, Ann Parker, Patty Davidson, Carole Look, Sonny Look, Jan Rolston, Len Rolston, Rosemary Garbett, Nancy Block, Mark Henry, and Paul (from New York, last name unknown).

An avid horseman, Look was active in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. He purchased several champion animals, many of which he donated back to the kids or to other charities. “Sonny Look went everywhere he thought he was needed and helped out,” said Maudeen Marks whose father co-founded the show. “He’s an institution unto himself.”¹⁰

Although Look won more awards and accolades than we could put in this magazine, the greatest mark of his success came in the number of people whose lives he positively impacted—the many people who, like my husband Tom, said, “He was like a father to me.”¹¹



A lifetime vice-president of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Look also served as secretary and treasurer. Many rodeo performers enjoyed the hospitality at Look’s Sir-Loin Inn, including Charley Pride shown with Look in 1970.



Marketing strategies for Look restaurants included the gold mugs and a relish bucket with raw vegetables, pickles, and olives. Look had to abandon using the mugs after the price rose from \$5 to \$16 a piece, and they became a favorite “souvenir” for diners to take.

Sonny wanted to help everyone, just as he had been helped along the way. He called his staff his associates not his employees, and he knew everyone’s name. His daughter Elizabeth recalled, “My Daddy was a great balance of businessman and father. I have great memories of making ‘the rounds’ on Saturday mornings — rounds to the hotels. He would speak to everyone — from housekeeping to kitchen staff to the front desk — and everyone in between. He truly loved the people who worked with him. And, he always made clear that his employees worked ‘with’ him, not ‘for’ him. They were a team together. He was not successful without them. He gave so many young kids and adults

chances to succeed and make something of themselves. He was super proud of his employees.” She added, “He taught me so much about owning and running a business. He was knowledgeable and wise and a great role model.”¹²

Unlike many entrepreneurs, as the business grew, Look took more time away from the restaurants than he had done in the early years. Gary remembers he and his wife, Toni, took many vacations with Sonny and Carole, and they had great times together. This was possible because Sonny trusted his associates to take responsibility for the restaurants when he was away. Carole recalled, “He never ever called home to see how things were. He said, ‘If they need me they know how to call me.’” Look believed this was the only way they could learn to make their own decisions.¹³

Many people worked for Sonny for decades. When the Sir-Loin Inn closed, Chef Princezola Jones had been there twenty-one years, starting out as a pantry girl. Similarly, restaurant manager Frank Robinson began working for Look at age twelve as a knight on the white horse.

Look found the right balance between being nice and being a tough businessman, instilling an appreciation for hard work and honesty. “He knew that his profits would walk out the back door of a restaurant in particular if you weren’t there,” Carole pointed out.

The “host’s host,” Sonny was equally comfortable with “down home” and gourmet experiences. Ortale recalled being in Houston only a week when he met Sonny for breakfast. “He just reached over and started putting [Tobasco] on my eggs, and I never looked back.” Even though Look spent his life in the restaurants, he enjoyed entertaining at home. Carole did most of the cooking, but Elizabeth recalls her dad would “occasionally, open the refrigerator, pull out any and all leftovers he could find, and throw together some hash. As a young girl, I would roll my eyes at that! But, he had a knack for putting together foods and flavors.” She recalled another incident when he impressed her friends by fixing a fabulous meal finished off with bananas foster.¹⁴

Faith was an important part of Sonny’s life. When he and Carole first married, he would go to his Lutheran church and then hurry back to go to the Baptist church with her before he finally “‘turned’ Baptist.” This was reflected in his advice to young people at the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management. “My motto has always been ‘The harder you work, the luckier you get.’ I would advise students and alumni to work hard, perform like champions, have pride in your work, never be a quitter, put forth that little extra effort, and give back to the community. Be honest in all things. An untruth, a shady deal, or an unsavory business practice will catch up with you. There is no substitute for integrity. Put God first in your lives. Get involved in a church and accompany your family to it. This is basic for happiness and success in life, both socially and business-wise.”

Sonny had a stroke on November 13, 1991. After that it became apparent that Look’s Sir-Loin Inn would need to close, which it did on December 31. Sunbelt Hotels was later sold to Lane Hospitality in Illinois. Sonny was in a wheelchair and his speech was affected, but his mind was as sharp as ever, and he never lost an ounce of charm or his ability to positively impact others. Gary remembered this time, “Dad

... was very generous and always wanted everyone to have a great time. This did not stop with his stroke. I gained all my values, work ethic and love of life from him; he was a terrific teacher and role model.”¹⁵



After Sonny had a stroke, Carole was determined, “we weren’t going to let any moss grow under us, so we just went and did.” Here Sonny and Carole joined the Harwells when their daughter Tracey married David Wyatt in August 2000.

Photo courtesy of author.

Although life did not change much socially for the Looks, when they were out, Carole stuck close by to prevent people being embarrassed if they could not understand what Sonny had to say; but she quickly found that this was never an issue when they talked business because “they just knew.” Once when he wheeled himself over to talk to a hotel desk clerk, she was amazed to see the two talk on and on without difficulty. “He was never shy about getting involved and trying.” Sonny passed away on December 29, 2003.

Never did I dream as a child that the nice man in the fancy red coat would have such an impact on my life. I remember dinners, parties, and convention trips—including one to Las Vegas when Sonny offered to take the wives to a “ladies’ club” in retaliation for the company president hauling the husbands off to a “gentlemen’s club.” (We went to dinner instead because the club was closed on Sunday; knowing Sonny, he probably already knew that). I remember equally well his concern when our son fell face first into his ice cream cone at the Look’s farm outside Brenham; and, after his stroke, when Carole invited us to join them for dinner at Brennan’s, and Sonny waited until after the meal to let us know we had come to share their anniversary celebration.

Carole commented, “What a shame that God didn’t make millions and millions of Sonny Looks.” And that’s the truth. In retrospect, I see Sonny as the John Wayne of restaurateurs—he was a humble horseman; but when he put on a show, he put on a show! 🍷

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Tony Vasquez and Chimichurri's Grill

Sonny Look impacted the lives of many of his employees and the lessons they learned working in his restaurants opened new opportunities. One such person is Tony Vasquez, co-owner of Chimichurri's South American Grill, a successful waterfront restaurant in Kingwood.¹⁶

Tony began his restaurant career as a busboy and started working for Sonny Look as a server at the Sir-Loin Inn around 1969. He transferred to the Sir-Loin House and then to Don Quixote's where Sonny promoted him to assistant manager. He worked with Look at the Depot when downtown was a popular nightspot. He would have continued working for Look but left after the restaurants closed. "I was very, very happy working for Mr. Look," Tony recalled.


At Sonny's restaurants, Tony learned about exceptional service and food quality; but, most importantly, he found someone who shared his passion for the industry. Tony remembers, "Mr. Look had the business in his heart, which is what I learned. Because everything I do, I learned from him. I open my heart when I am at the restaurant . . . Mr. Look used to go around to every table in every restaurant. . . . Everybody knew Mr. Look." Tony reflected on how Sonny made the rounds of tables in each restaurant, talking to customers and pouring water and his rosé wine, "I haven't seen any owner of any restaurant that I worked for that the owner goes around the tables and talks to the people."

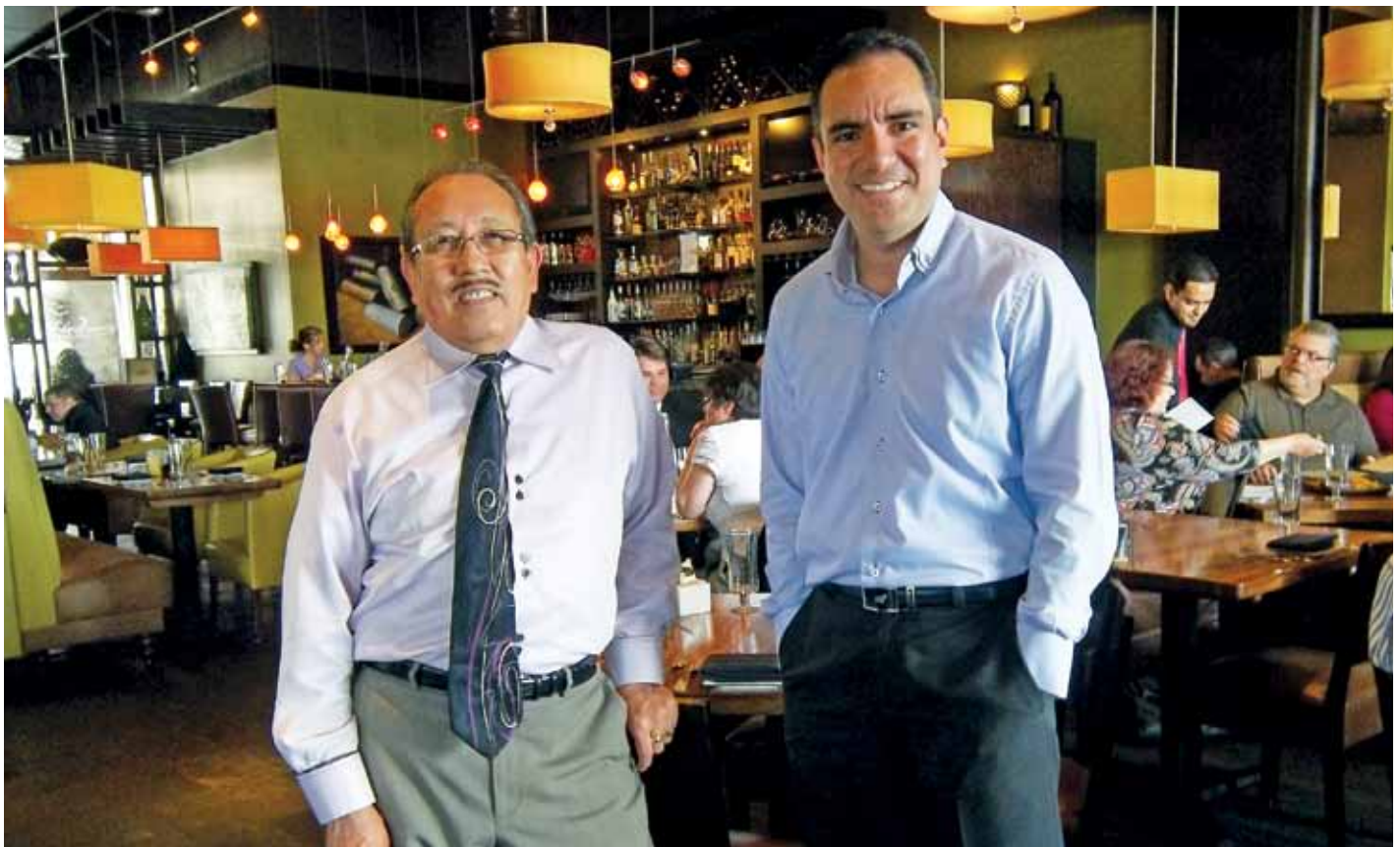
Tony always aspired to open his restaurant, but that takes money and experience. Once, Sonny offered to help

him, a gesture that Tony appreciated, but he was not yet ready. In April 2008, however, the time was right. Tony along with his son-in-law and co-owner, Ronald Perez, opened Chimichurri's, an upscale, comfortable, lakefront restaurant offering a quality dining experience.

The whole family, including Tony's wife, Rosa, and their daughters, have been involved in every step of the three-year process to realize the dream of owning their own restaurant—even down to the most minute details of the décor. The cuisine includes elements from many South American countries, and recipes incorporate specific items from those countries. Tony follows the example he learned from Sonny, visiting with the customers. "We put our heart into it because this is our own," he said. Ronald Perez added, "Consistency is our main concern" when it comes to food and service.

Now Vasquez and Perez are expanding the operation. This spring, they will open a new restaurant next door, Puerto. With cuisine based on the taco stands of Mexico City, it will provide a nice atmosphere with unique offerings where families can get in and get out quickly or linger. Although the atmosphere is casual, it will have the same standards of service and quality that Tony learned from Sonny all those years ago.

Chimichurri's is in King's Harbor on Lake Houston at 1660 West Lake Houston Parkway, Kingwood, TX 77339, (281) 360-0015, www.chimichurrisgrill.com. Puerto opens late spring at the same address, www.puertotacos.com. 



Tony Vasquez and co-owner Ronald Perez at Chimichurri's South American Grill in Kingwood, Texas.

Food for the Body, Food for the Spirit: Irma Gabran and Her Award-Winning Mexican Restaurant, Irma's

By Sandra Davidson



In the 1940s, young Irma González Galvan moved with her family from Brownsville, Texas, to Houston's Second Ward. As children, Irma's brothers shined shoes, while Irma and her sister worked at their school cafeteria and neighboring bakeries in order to help their mother. These early experiences, combined with later work in retail, and the desire to overcome personal tragedy, culminated in Galvan's 1989 opening of her own Mexican restaurant, Irma's.

The success of Irma's, particularly being named an America's Classic by the James Beard Foundation in 2008, has brought Galvan much attention in the form of articles and interviews. Megan Schneider interviewed Irma in 2008 for the "Houston Oral History Project"; two years later, I interviewed her for the Center for Public History's project at the University of Houston, "Gulf Coast Foodways: History, Culture, and Economy."¹

The very first time I met Irma, she asked me if the interview was going to take place right then. She was ready, I was not! When I returned at a later date, Galvan looked much as she had before—a petite lady, hair pulled neatly back, and eyes sparkling behind dark-rimmed glasses. Her physical appearance, combined with the long, white apron she wore, made Galvan look every bit the mother

or friend figure amid this comfy home away from home where photographs, articles, and knickknacks cover the walls. Because most items came from family, friends, and customers, they reflect what Irma's means to the community, what the community means to Irma, and the link between food and family.

Sandra Davidson [SD]: What are some of your earliest memories of cooking?

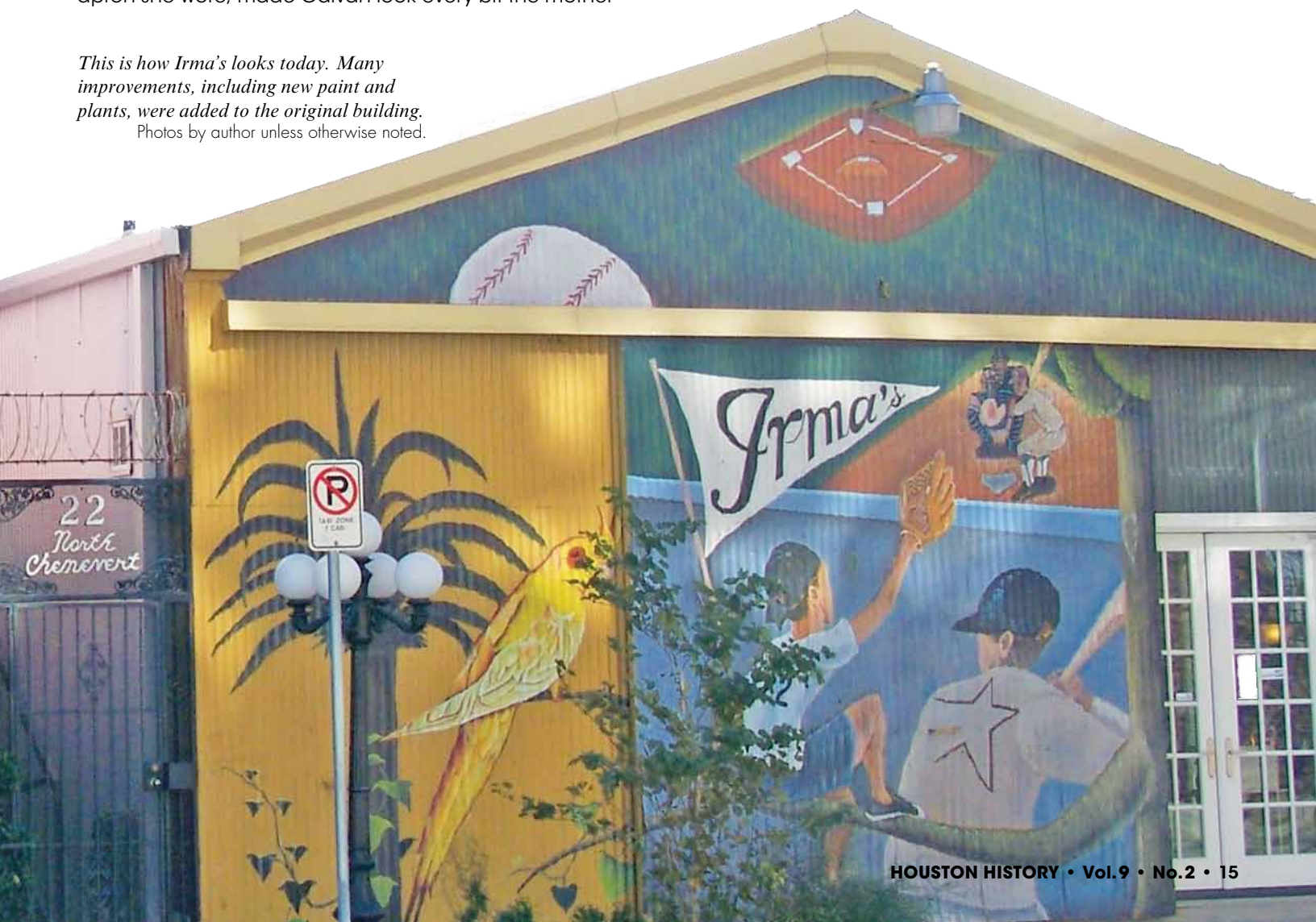
Irma Galvan (IG): I was like a mother to my two brothers and my sister. I cooked for them. And I remember the first time that I learned how to make Mexican rice. ... It didn't turn out very well at first, but I think when you try and try again you kind of get the niche to do it better. So we had rice for breakfast, rice for lunch, and rice for dinner, and that was the first thing that I remember. And another thing too is the *picadillo*, you know, the ground beef, and refried beans. I was the chef in the family. ... But it was good because I learned how to be responsible and how to cook.

SD: What do you remember about your school experience?

IG: I have always lived in the Second Ward area, ... I've been here forever. I went to Our Lady of Guadalupe School, ... Marshall Junior High, and I graduated from Jefferson Davis High School. ... We didn't have anything when we were kids. We always took tacos for lunch and the other kids took ham sandwiches. We were embarrassed to take

This is how Irma's looks today. Many improvements, including new paint and plants, were added to the original building.

Photos by author unless otherwise noted.





Irma Galvan proudly holds her James Beard Award. Irma's was the only restaurant from Texas to win in 2008.

tacos to school. ... that kind of made me be the way I am ... you learn from those experiences, [and] you try to better yourself in life.

Megan Schneider [MS]: After working for [Furniture Warehouse owned by Melvin Littman], what happened that pulled you towards opening a restaurant?

IG: I had a friend that told me ... "Open you up a sandwich shop right here on Chenevert." And I told him, "Well, I am not good at that." He said, "No, you are a good cook." But this was a warehouse area and everybody was moving out of here. ... It was like a ghost town here. It was a very dangerous and very depressing area. Finally, he talked me into it and I opened up a sandwich shop, and I did not do very well for the last two or three months. It used to be where people would come in, grab a sandwich and get a bag of chips, a drink, and on the go. But I got stuck with a lot of sandwiches. ... Nobody came out here. I started fixing up the place because ... people did not want to come up here. I started landscaping. I had my friends help me paint the building, decorate it a little bit, brought in little whatnots and I had started [to get] people coming in.

I was delivering tacos to the judges, to the courthouse. ... I opened the restaurant in 1989 and ... I started getting attorneys, judges, bankers, the police department, the sheriff's department, and it was all word of mouth that I got these people in. I made it a point all the time to be here to wait on my customers. I greet them at the door, I go to their table. Sometimes I know what they like, how they like the stuff cooked, and they bring me customers from all over the

world. During the spring, the teachers come with the kids, and during the summer, people travel from out of town to come to Irma's. And I have to be here because when they travel from so far ... I want to make sure that I am here to take care of them.

SD: What changes in the building have you made since you first started?

IG: When I first started it was a little table that I brought from my house. I brought a lot of stuff from my house. I had no pots. No pans. No nothing. ... Then I'd say about three years later I borrowed money from the bank to do my middle dining room. And people said, "Please don't change. Don't get big. They tend to lose this and that." I said, "Well, I hope not, but I'm going to try to do the same thing that I did—decorate with Mexican flair, New Orleans and the Warehouse District. And it caught on.

MS: I heard that when you were first starting the restaurant, people would steal things and that people actually stole the plant out in front of the restaurant.

IG: When I first opened up here, we painted the building real nice...I put beautiful Mexican pots with palm trees and stuff like that. I am from the Valley so I like palm trees. I decorated really nice. I would come, and I said, something is missing. All my pots were gone. I started planting little palms along the side of the restaurant. They were pulled out. That kept on for a long time. I got a friend of mine who is like six foot seven [inches tall] and there was a Fiesta Ballroom right here on the corner of Franklin, so they were taking those plants up there to sell them to the ladies up there at the ballroom. ... I knew who was doing it [because] they came and told me. I got my friend, and we got a play gun — you couldn't tell the difference. I approached the two guys, and I said, "You have been stealing the plants from me." "Oh, no, no." "Yes, you have." As a matter of fact, he had a little buggy with a couple of the plants of palm trees, so I knew they were mine. My friend told them, "If you ever do this again, we are going to come up here and get you." They [replied], "Oh, no, we are not going to do it anymore." ... The thing about it is they broke in the building here two or three times. They stole my meat. That is the reason that I have all this wrought iron all over the restaurant. When I first opened it was very, very hard to keep anything that was not attached to the building.

SD: Where did all the wall décor come from?

IG: They came from my customers. People that travel say, "Irma, I brought you this." If I see people that I know [are] in the paper I cut it [out] and put it on the wall. I have a lot of the people that are running for office, and they say, "Irma, can you put the sign on your restaurant?" I say, "I'd be happy to." I have things that I have [from] people [who] have passed away, and they're still here. Their family comes here and they say, "Oh, Irma, you still have it here?" I said, "Yes, I do." I have things that customers want to buy. And I say "No money can buy the things that were handed to me from my people so there is no price. Things are priceless."

SD: Let's talk a little bit about food. How do you know what you're going to be serving on a particular day?

IG: When I first started, we had about two or three different things on the menu because we have a very tiny kitchen. I



Irma knows how to decorate. She frequently acquires pieces from customers and deeply values all of the items that line her walls.

Photos by Naveen Inampudi.

had like *chile rellenos*, I had *mole poblano*. I had enchiladas. Things that do not sell, I [would] delete them from the menu. And things that [did], well I put it twice a week on the menu. We have no menus because we want to do what the customer wants. ... Usually when you go to a restaurant they have a menu and they say you cannot change it. I said, "Okay, but that's not the way I want to do things. I want to be able to please my people, my customers."

SD: What are some of the more popular things that people order?

IG: Vegetarian fresh spinach enchiladas with a green tomatillo sauce. The roasted poblano peppers stuffed with chicken, beef, or cheese. Those are very popular. The mole

poblano is very good. Steaks—ribeyes, black angus, is one of our good sellers and then we have a very good seller. It's the talapia fish with shrimp with the sun dried tomatoes, mushrooms and fresh garlic.

SD: What is your favorite dish?

IG: I like eating my food. All of it. Actually, I have no favorite. They're all good.

SD: Could you please tell us a little bit about the James Beard Award that you won?

IG: About three years ago there [were] about sixteen people that came in. It was about one o'clock in the afternoon and my friend Alison Cook, who is one of our good customers—she brought some people in to eat. ... I love waiting

on people personally. I sat them in the front dining room. ... I walked up to them, and I said, "Okay, what would you all like to eat?" And they said, "Well, we don't know." So I took the initiative, and I said, "You know what? Let me fix you something good." I served it family style. You know, *casuelas*, the bowls of mole poblano, mole enchiladas, Mexican enchiladas. ... Tamales. ... Chile rellenos. [I] cut it up in small portions, and I put it on the table, and I passed it around ... They loved it. They took my picture. ... I would say it was about a month later, I saw it in the paper that I had gotten the James Beard Award in Houston, Texas. I said, "Oh my God." I was shocked. You know these people had visited other restaurants, and I don't remember what restaurants they visited, but nevertheless I was very happy that Irma's little hole in the wall had gotten the James Beard Award. I got a call about two months later. I was in the middle of lunch, and they asked for me. I said, "This is Irma." And she said, "You have won this and that." I said, "You know what? Can you call me later?" 'cause I didn't know—understand what they were saying. I said, you know, they're always trying to sell you something. She called me the next day, and she said that I had gotten the award. She explained to me I got plane tickets, and I said, "Oh, my God." Of course it was in the paper, and I was very, very, happy. This was like an Academy Award. I went to New York to the Lincoln Center, and it was like the red carpet. Bobby Flay gave me the award. Actually there [were] five restaurants, and the only one in Texas was me. ... When I went up there to New York they interviewed us even before I got there. It was—it was like a dream. I mean they picked me among other fine restaurants in Houston. We have very good restaurants. We have very good chefs. I'm not a chef. I'm just a homey person thinking, or hoping, that people like my home cooking.

SD: You also won the State Farm Embrace Life Award. Could you tell me about that?

IG: I remember this very well. It was a summer, a summer day about five thirty. And my girlfriend Gracie Saenz, who was on City Council, she calls me up and she says, "Irma, I'm going to write a story about you." She had been trying to sit down and talk to me, but I was very busy. Always busy. So she says, "I got maybe twenty-four hours to turn this in." She was interviewing me when I was out in the parking lot parking cars. She said, "I want to know about your life, how you started your business and stuff like that." I was on my cell phone giving her all the information. She said, "I'm going to turn your name in and hopefully we'll do something." I said, "Yeah, Gracie. Right." Then I get another call about a month later, and this lady says, "Irma, this is so-and-so, and you've won the ... State Farm Embrace Life Award." I said, "Yeah, okay." Again. That was the first time I said, "Yeah, okay." And again she says, "I'm going to mail you a packet." I said, "Okay." ... I got all the information—a trip for two to New York, my first trip to New York. ... I was shocked and pleasantly surprised that I had won the award. I got ten thousand dollars, the round trip for two to New York, the hotel, dinners at three different places. Beautiful. You know when people say, "I love New York,"

I say, "Everybody loves New York." But when I went to New York, I loved New York very much.

SD: Was there an awards ceremony for that also?

IG: Yes. There was a little awards ceremony, and they did kind of a little history on each of the winners, the five. ... They called mine, "Diamond in the Rough" because of the area, my life history, how a widow like me has strived to better themselves ... not only for themselves, but for their family. My four kids, they're not kids anymore, they're forty, forty-five. I still call them my kids.

SD: One of your kids has a restaurant.

IG: Yes, Louis, my oldest son. ... He has Irma's Southwest Grill on the corner of Texas and Austin. He's been there [about] thirteen years now. ... He's doing very, very well and I'm very, very happy for him. ... [it] means a lot to me when he asks me for permission or ideas.


SD: Were you surprised when he wanted to open a restaurant?

IG: No, I wasn't surprised. I wanted him to do that because he's got different ideas than I do. And ... I want him to do things on his own. I really wasn't surprised. I was kind of sad that I had to lose him because everyone loved Louis here at the restaurant, but in a way it's better. He's bettering himself in going in different directions.

SD: Do you have similar food?

IG: Not really. He's got my lemonade, the fresh fruit lemonade. But he does more like sea bass and different things than I do. If he does the things that I do they are different, differently cooked than mine.

SD: What do you think is the most important lesson you have learned over the years?

IG: I think losing my husband, losing my job has made me a stronger person. ... When my husband passed away, I had no insurance. I had no *dinero*, no money. My kids were very young. My youngest one was five years old. When I first opened up here, it wasn't good. I wasn't doing very well. Actually, nobody knew that I had a restaurant here ... because everybody was gone. The thing that I had learned from this is, don't give up. I swear I wanted to give up, just like I want to give up opening at nights. But you know, if [I] give up, I will never have respect for myself ... because you know what? I know I can do it. With God's help, and people that know Irma, they have helped me through this because I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my friends and my customers. ... You have to have confidence in yourself. When you start losing confidence, you start losing—like me trying to give up, it wouldn't be me. If I die, I would have that always in my heart, and I cannot do that. I cannot look back. I have to look forward. And I have to go forward. 

Irma's, just blocks from Minute Maid Park, is located at 22 N. Chenevert Street, Houston, Texas, 77002. Hours are Monday through Wednesday 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Thursday and Friday 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., and Saturday 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The restaurant is closed on Sundays.

Sandra Davidson is currently a Ph.D. student studying history at the University of Houston.

Ideal Housewives: Home Economics at the University of Houston

By Aimee L'Heureux



Blanche Goul, Minnie Abberman, Sarah Groves, and Dorothy Callientts sit in front of a sign boasting homemaking is a career! "Today a major in home economics entails more than first learning to cook and sew. It meets a girl's needs as a homemaker or as a businesswoman." (Houstonian, 1958, p. 303).

The Home Economics Department at the University of Houston lasted from 1945 to 1977.

According to the 1950 University of Houston yearbook, *The Houstonian*, Home Economics offered instruction in food and nutrition, institution administration, clothing, textiles, costume design, interior decoration, child development, family life, and home economics education. "Home ec girls make clothes and model them. They learn how to prepare a first-rank meal economically and cut failures to a minimum." Concurrent with the growth of the University at that time, the Home Economics Department grew, and in 1954 the Home Ec House was built to accommodate the

expanding program. A waiting list to take a special home economics course resulted from the desire to live in the new Home Ec House, a luxury for the girls enrolled in the class. But as the times changed, so did the campus, and in 1977 the program ended. The following photo essay tells a history of Home Ec at the University of Houston.

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All photos courtesy of the Digital Library, UH Photographs Collection, 1948-2000, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston. To view these photos and much more, visit their website, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/>.



“This is really living! This work of art is the reason there’s a waiting list to take the special home economics course. Girls enrolled in the class get to live in the new Home Ec House.” (Houstonian, 1954, p.49) The Home Management House that stood across from Law Hall, allowed University co-eds to live “in ultramodern surroundings.” Students of Home Ec learned “to cook, plan meals, and learn through experience to be ideal housewives.” (Houstonian, 1957, p. 9).

Over the years, Home Economics has offered a variety of courses at the University of Houston, including: Food Preparation; Elementary Costume Design; Textiles; Food Preservation; Diet in Disease; Nutrition; Development and Nursery Education; Interior House Design and Furnishings; Home Management; Experimental Cookery; Meal Planning and Table Service; Large Quantity Cookery; Institution Purchasing and Marketing; Food Cost and Institution Accounting; Institution Administration; Clothing; Pattern Study and Construction; Children’s Clothing; Modeling and Draping; Tailoring; Child Development and Family Life; Apparel Arts and Merchandising; Housing, Interior Decoration, and Related Arts; Food and Nutrition; Home Economics, Journalism, Photography, Radio, and Television; Institution Administration and Restaurant Management; Home Economic Education; Food Preparation and Selection; Apparel Analysis; Consumer Science; Human and Consumer Advocacy; Communication Development for Human Development and Consumer Sciences; and Methods of Teaching Home Economics. (University of Houston Catalogue, 1944-1945, 1954-1955, and 1976-1977).





In 1949, the Home Economics Club had over thirty members. It was charged with the maintenance of the student lounge in the Home Ec building, and club members cooked and served dinners for various campus clubs in 1950. The Home Economics Honor's Society, Phi Upsilon Omicron, encourages both the intellectual and professional development of its members. (Houstonian, 1949, 1950, and 1971).

Members of the Home Economics Club "are minors or majors in the field of home economics, take part in a program which encourages them to become the best possible professional home economists—or the most efficient and imaginative homemakers. Besides numerous weekly luncheons and periodic style shows, to which the girls jokingly refer as 'practice,' the club also stages an annual dinner honoring the 'Home Economics Girl of the Year.' The recipients must have good grades in home economics as well as in other courses, must be of good moral character and must be deserving of the honor bestowed upon her." (Houstonian, 1957, p. 192).

◀ Sarah Jo Lie opened the oven to baste a roast. Similar to the whole University at that time, the Home Economics Department was rapidly expanding in 1949 under the direction of Mrs. Fay Anthis, Home Ec had eight complete and modern kitchen units. (Houstonian, 1949).

PEAR UPSIDE DOWN CAKE #1426

1 cup flour, sifted	5 tablespoons brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon baking soda	1/4 cup dark molasses
1/4 teaspoon salt	1/2 cup sour milk or buttermilk
1 teaspoon cinnamon	1/4 cup shortening, melted
3/4 teaspoon ginger	3 ripe pears, peeled and halved
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg	6 walnuts
1 egg, slightly beaten	2 tablespoons chopped walnuts

1. Sift together all the dry ingredients.
2. Combine egg, sugar, molasses, milk and shortening; gradually add flour mixture, stirring until mixed. Beat vigorously about one minute until the batter is smooth.
3. Place the pear halves, cut side down into a well greased nine inch crinkle edge heat resistant glass pie plate. Place a walnut in the center of each pear. Pour the gingerbread mixture over the pears. Sprinkle with chopped walnuts and bake in a moderate oven, 350°F., about 30 minutes.

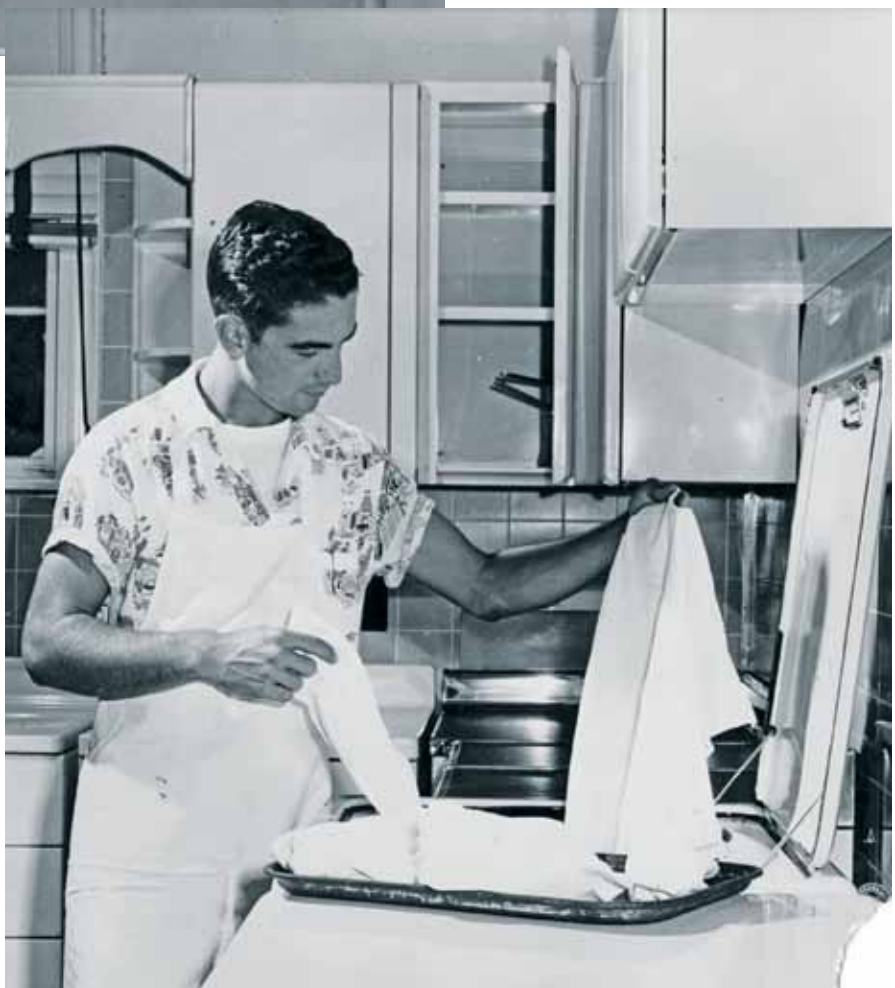




A Home Economics demonstration is filmed at the University of Houston by KUHT, Channel 8, the world's first education television station.

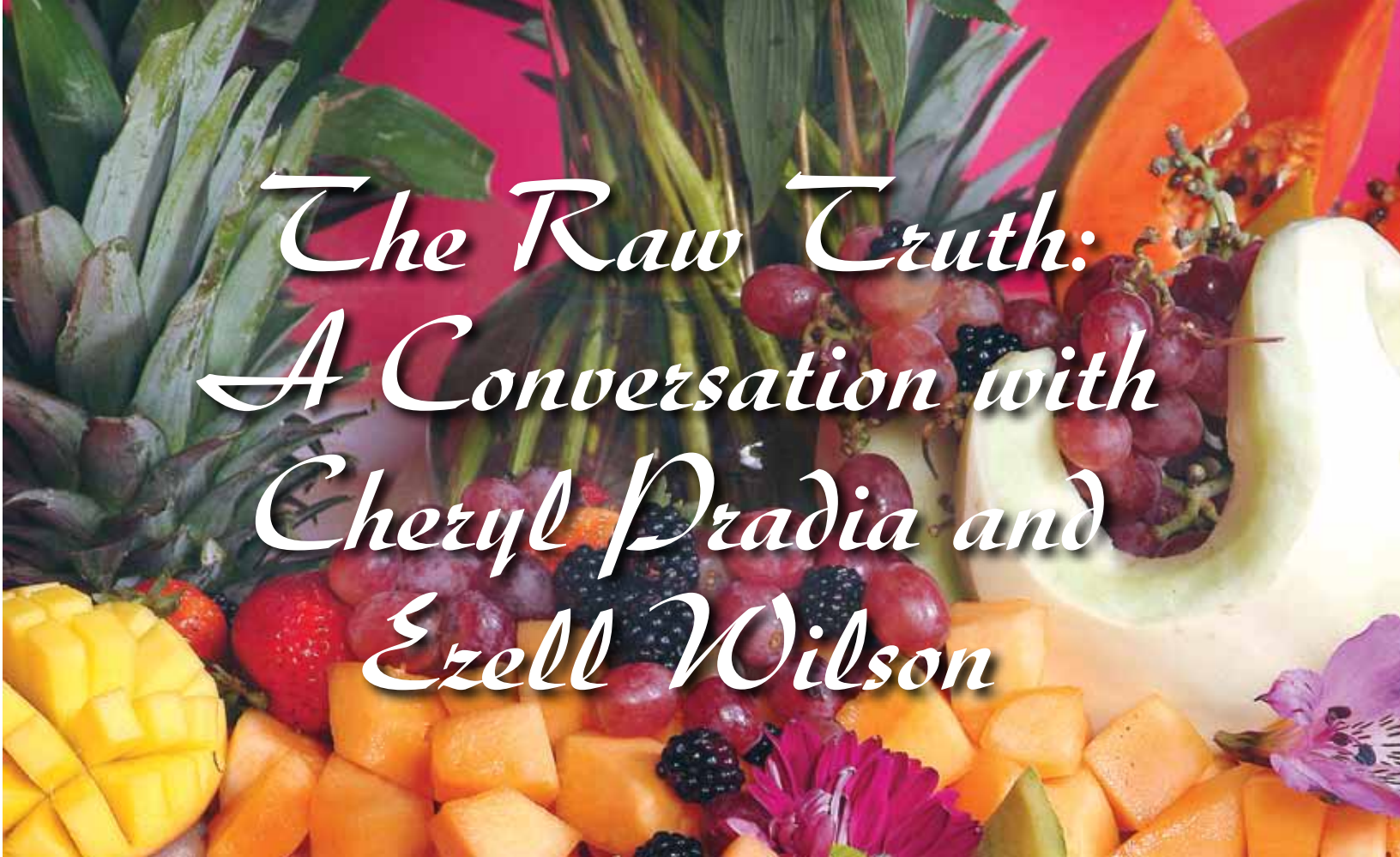
In 1955, two graduate Home Economists and a dietician headed the cafeteria, located in Oberholzer Hall. Serving three meals a day, seven days a week, the cafeteria served an average of 1,500 meals per day. (*Houstonian*, 1955, p. 361).

*Although Home Economics was geared toward women, men did take part in the department as students and professors. Here a male student is shown folding napkins. In 1957, the Home Economics staff was made up of seven women and one man, Edmund B. Roberts. (*Houstonian*, 1957, p. 53).*



Pastel Hue—Year's Fairest:
This section of the *Houstonian* offered short bios of the most attractive women on campus. The following excerpt from 1957 featured one of the Home Economics majors. "A refreshing, sparkling countenance is possessed by CHARLOTTE SMITH, sophomore home economics major. Charlotte is specifically interested in apparel arts and retailing. She lists sewing as a special hobby. Charlotte is uncertain as to future plans, but she is considering the field of marketing."

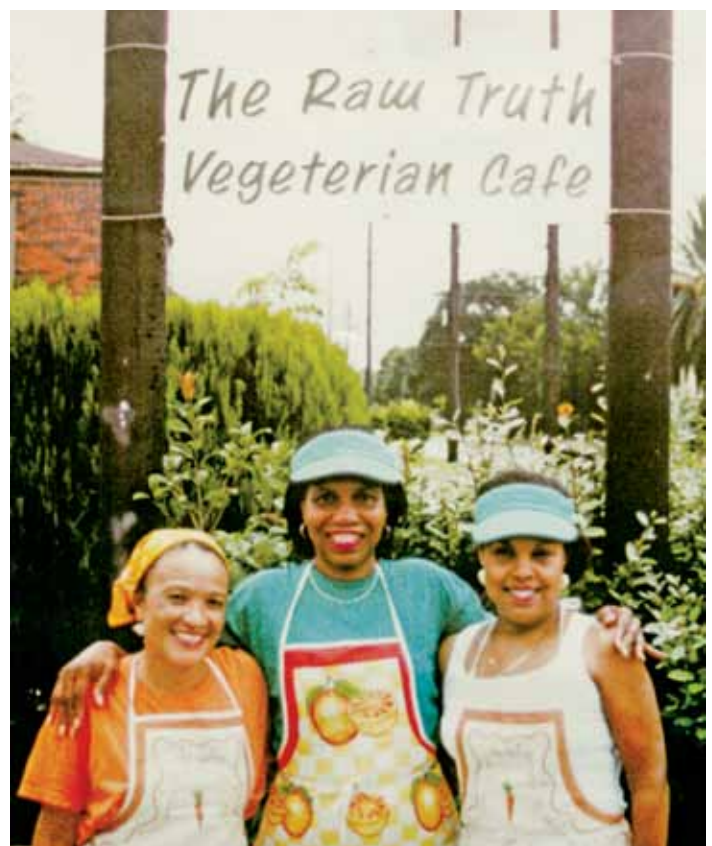
The Raw Truth: A Conversation with Cheryl Pradia and Ezell Wilson



Colorful assorted fruit tray.

Photo courtesy of Al-Fin Photography.

For a few years in the mid-2000s, S.H.A.P.E. Community Center in Houston's Third Ward was the home to The Raw Truth Vegetarian Restaurant and Vegan Café, a local eatery that served both cooked and raw food meals to a varied clientele. One of the restaurant's defining and unique characteristics was its raw food preparations. While the practice of following a raw food diet is quite varied in its forms—including Paleo dieters who advocate eating raw meat along with other uncooked foods; vegetarian versions that adhere to Natural Hygiene principles that eschew processed foods, condiments, and other dietary and physiological stimulants; and other paradigms—what they all typically agree on is that foods should not be heated over approximately 115 degrees Fahrenheit. To do so is believed to damage the food's nutrient content. Though Houston has a number of grocers and eateries dedicated to the promotion of healthier eating and lifestyles, the Raw Truth was one of the few restaurants in the city with raw food preparations on its menu. This devotion to a growing culinary niche captured the attention of PETA, which recognized The Raw Truth with its Best Veggie Burger in North America award in 2005. The restaurant was run by a partnership of women that included Chef Cheryl Pradia. A native of Houston, Pradia has been involved in the culinary world for many years. She has worked for another Houston Mexican dining institution, Ninfa's, and has received certification in raw food preparation from renowned raw food chef Alissa Cohen. The Raw Truth itself often served as the meeting place for a number of social and political organizations both internal and external to S.H.A.P.E. Pradia's own journey on the path to the raw food diet and her tenure as head of The Raw Truth was a long one that started early on. Though The Raw Truth is no longer open, Cheryl Pradia remains active, working as a caterer and sharing the discoveries she has made about diet and health with others in workshops.



Barbara Miller, Vivian Richardson, and Cheryl Pradia outside of S.H.A.P.E. Community Center, home to The Raw Truth Vegetarian Restaurant and Vegan Cafe.

Photo courtesy of S.H.A.P.E. Community Center.

EZELL WILSON (EW): What was your early relationship with food like, growing up?

CHERYL PRADIA (CP): My paternal and maternal grandparents grew up in Louisiana—in south Louisiana, so my experience with food early on was Creole food, gumbo, etouffe, crab, shrimp, you name it, but mainly seafood. We had soul food, but it was mainly seafood, and, so I was always interested in food—in the flavors and all, so I would sit in the kitchen on a stool and watch my grandparents cook. My mother was born in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, and she is an excellent cook as well.

EW: How did you begin your journey? How did you find out about raw food and the raw food movement?

CP: I really started about twenty-five years ago reading a book called *Fit for Life*. I was on my way out of town for the Fourth of July weekend, and I was in the airport and bought this book because it was talking about food combining and how meat just sits in your stomach for days before it's digested. And by the time I landed, I just said, "no more meat for me." And so that next week when I got back home, I bought a juicer, and I started juicing, and the flavors of the live food were just awesome. I burned up the juicer within the week. So I bought about five juicers before I decided to buy a commercial juicer.

One day I went into Ye Seekers, which is now Whole Foods on Bellaire, and a lady named Olivia Franklin was in there, and she was talking about raw foods, and I said, "raw foods? You're talking about, you know, cucumbers and tomatoes and lettuce" and she said, "Well, there's more to it than that." She was demoing raw ice cream, and I say, "raw ice cream?" She said, "Yes, it's made with nuts and bananas and its non-dairy." So I stood there, while she made raw ice cream. I stood there for four hours, talking with her and eating the raw ice cream, and we exchanged numbers. She grew up in New Orleans, a vegetarian all of her life, and she decided to become raw. I was interested in knowing more about it, but I said, "Never, never will I give up my shrimp, my crawfish, my gumbo—I'll never do that." She said, "Well, never say never." So we exchanged numbers, and then I kept calling her. She wouldn't call me back, so, about two weeks later, she said, "Are you serious?" And I said, "Yes."

She was also a hair stylist, and so I went to her house, and she was making all of these raw dishes, and everything was good—except the seaweed. We would go to a restaurant called, Rick's: it was inside of the Ye Seekers on Westview, and they had the most wonderful salad bar. And she would make her own dressing and bring it in there. I asked, "Why are you bringing your own dressing to a restaurant?" She said, "Because I don't know what's in the food, so I'm bringing my own. Do you want to be my friend?" she asked. I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well don't question what I'm doing." I was still ordering turkey burgers; I just had not given up the poultry yet—or the seafood. I kept speaking with her about it, and every week she made a different raw dish, and she'd call me to taste it.

At the time, I was working full-time with Ninfa's, in the catering department. I was the event planner and catering director, and I had been there a very long time. I'd started preparing foods there, learning the Mexican cuisine. So I



Raw food chef Cheryl M. Pradia, former owner/manager of The Raw Truth Vegetarian Restaurant and Vegan Cafe.

had my Creole background of flavors, and then my great aunt worked for Italians in New Orleans, so she taught us how to make wonderful Italian food. I had those two cultures and then the raw foods, so I was always tasting something and adding something to it because I wanted different flavors. And so she [Olivia] would allow me to, and then would say, "Oh, that's good, that's good." So we were collaborating on raw foods.

One day she said, "I want you to meet someone," so we went to Sunshine's and I met him. And I didn't know about Sunshine—this was in 1989.

"Sunshine" is Vergis Bourgeois, the owner of Sunshine Health Food Store and Vegetarian Deli, which opened in 1983 and is one of the first restaurants in Houston to serve raw food and vegetarian dishes. For many years, Bourgeois has taught classes and held meetings and workshops on a variety of topics related to health and hygiene, including classes on raw food meal preparation. The restaurant is now operated by his daughter, Arga.

I was telling him that I had a few problems with indigestion, so he read my eyes. I thought Sunshine was a fortune teller [laughs]. I had never heard of an iridologist before. He told me all of the surgeries I'd had—just by reading my eyes. You know, I thought that was so amazing and he said, "Well, come to my meeting on Wednesday." So I went to his health meeting and that's how I joined the community of

more people eating raw. And, you know, I started going to all of his workshops every month at S.H.A.P.E. Community Center and got interested in it, and then he wanted someone to take over his deli.

I met some ladies, and they started working in the deli and named it Sunshine Harvest. I would leave Ninfa's and go there for lunch every day. I'd call in my order, and when I got there, it wasn't ready, so I started giving them pointers on organization. Barbara Miller, who was one of the owners of the little Sunshine's Harvest, said, "Why don't you come in and help us?" I said, "Well, I have too much to do and that's not really what I want to do." But something kept drawing me into the movement. Their stay there at Sunshine Harvest wasn't very long, but we would go to S.H.A.P.E. because Aubrey Pierre had a restaurant there where we would go for veggie burgers. He left and the space became available, and Barbara Miller called me and said, "We want to open our own restaurant, we need your help." Again, I said, "I'm busy; I don't really want to do that." She kept on, and I said, "Well, I will help you part time." Well, that part-time became a full-time partnership at S.H.A.P.E. when we opened The Raw Truth Vegetarian and Vegan Café. So, that's how I got started in the movement.

EW: You had this raw experience here in the Black community. Oftentimes, when people think of the raw food community, they usually think perhaps young, Caucasian, that sort of thing—so what has been your experience in the raw food movement?

CP: It started with someone like Sunshine that was, to me, way before his time with the movement, with Dick Gregory, and a man named Aris LaTham that taught Sunshine. They were into the movement a long time and brought it to the forefront of our Black community. Even though I didn't know anything about raw food, it was still in existence in so many areas and in the Caribbean as well. It's a blessing that we have him in our community to educate our people about it. I feel that, with Raw Truth being in the community and providing the wonderful dishes that we had, expanded the



Chef Pradia shares a moment with co-owner and friend, the late Vivian Richardson.

knowledge. We had people coming from all over Houston, from Kingwood and the Woodlands, to eat at Raw Truth. We had put out posters and flyers in *Optimal Health* in Austin and, really, all over with the Vegetarian Society, which was mainly Caucasian. They would have their monthly meetings at Raw Truth. We were a catalyst for the Black community, but expanding knowledge about what we had to offer to everyone.

EW: Did you see The Raw Truth as having a political or social kind of vision to it in addition to the eating of natural foods?

CP: Yes, I think so. I think that it was a way of bringing people together for social, political, spiritual reasons: just a roundabout, cohesive gathering of communities.

EW: When you began to get into raw foods, what was the response of your family and friends now that you were making such a tremendous change in your dietary habits?

CP: My mother was very sad. We would always have big dinners like those you would see on the television show *Soul Food* on Sundays, and she was very sad that I was refusing to eat shrimp, okra, and pork roast: all of the really good foods that I once enjoyed. When I first started to do the detox and the wellness cleanse, I dropped about twenty-five pounds, so I had gone from maybe a size ten to size two. So my other family members thought I was in a cult [laughs], and they were really worried. They were talking among themselves and thought that maybe I had HIV or that I was just really sick. But you go through that transition when you're cleansing, to cleanse the body of all of the toxins and then you're able to find your right weight, and I felt so good and so healthy. The very first time I did the New Body cleanse, I really felt like I had a new body; I really did. It's not one of the easiest cleanses to do with the olive oil and CKLS [an herbal formula meant to be beneficial for the colon, kidney, liver, and spleen], but after being up all night, the next day I found I had dropped five pounds overnight. I had so much energy and so much mental clarity, and it was just an awesome feeling that I didn't want to go back to eating those things that caused me to feel sluggish and regain all the weight. I was a Dr. Pepper addict, and my office being right near the restaurant, I was just back and forth, drinking Dr. Pepper. Most of the weight was sodium, and I got rid of all of that. I always had a lot of energy, but with the cleanse, and with the live foods, I just—I was like an Energizer bunny, just always going and helping and just vibrant with lots of energy.

EW: What was the experience like running your own restaurant, that is, The Raw Truth Vegetarian Café?

CP: It was a great experience. It was a wonderful experience. We started out with three business partners, and after four months, Barbara Miller left to go to California, and it was Vivian Richardson and I. I was still employed full-time at Ninfa's, so I would go in the evenings and prepare the raw dishes for the next day and prepare some of the cooked items, such as the beans or the spaghetti sauce, whatever. And really, basically, Vivian ran the day to day operations, but I was mainly the behind the scenes person, because I had the experience in restaurants and catering. I guess the

challenge there was not enough space, in that area that we had. What was devastating for me was when Vivian died in 2006. That was a real shock to me because she was in remission for thirteen years. She had cancer and no one knew it. That was a testimony within itself how raw foods helped her—you know, after she was diagnosed, and after she became vegan—to have the same quality of life for thirteen years before she finally passed away. But she didn't share that—I didn't know, no one knew. And so that was really hard for me, after she passed, to continue with the restaurant.

EW: You've done so many events where you're teaching people how to prepare raw foods and you're getting people to look at their nutrition and health through the concept of raw foods and vegetarian meals. How do you feel working in a realm where you're opening people's eyes to a new perspective on their diet?

CP: It is really a blessing because in the beginning I said that I would never become a vegetarian. And so, I just feel that God has moved me in this arena to share the knowledge that has been given to help other people. Because I know that through raw foods, through live foods, that it is so much better, and I feel that it is a mission to share and to



Chef Pradia's raw food buffet at a Houston Cardiac Association event.
Photo courtesy of Al-Fin Photography.




Guacamole and raw beets with ginger and Fuji apple slices.
Photo courtesy of Al-Fin Photography.

help people, especially African Americans, who are dying every day of diabetes and heart problems and hypertension. And, so I just feel that it is a blessing for me to share the knowledge that I have experienced and have been able to be blessed to have been taught.

EW: Relying upon your vast experience in food over the years, what is your view of the food culture here in Houston in general and—in the Third Ward in particular?

CP: In Houston, we have so many different cultures and food cultures as well, and I feel that the culture—as far as raw foods—it's increasing here in Houston. People are more knowledgeable about raw foods, and I would really like to see more raw and live foods here in Houston. We're a little behind as far as organic and raw food restaurants. But, as far as culture, Houston has a vast culture of so many different ethnic cuisines here. And I don't know if I will open another live food restaurant, but I would love to see, or help someone to—my goal is to maybe have another live food restaurant, maybe in collaboration with someone else.

EW: Is there anything else that you would like to point out in moving towards the future?

CP: I would like to say that if people in our community would maybe just take the time. They don't have to be vegetarian or vegan—but maybe just take maybe one day a week to fast, or to not eat meat, to just maybe go vegetarian for the day. Maybe take a Wednesday and just be in tune with your body and just start out by maybe just one day a week and just see how well you feel—just from eliminating something that may cause an illness. Because if you don't combine your foods properly, and if you are just staying with the SAD diet, which is the Standard American Diet, then you will not have the energy, you will not have the willpower in order to continue to live, because there's so many different things. It's not just food, it's stress of everyday life. It's the elements, you know, it's the air we breathe. So, if you would just take the time to maybe one day a week and just, maybe, fast and juice, or maybe just eat all fruit, then I think that you would enhance your life—enhance the quality of life while you're on this earth. 

Ezell Wilson is a graduate student in history at the University of Houston and a Third Ward resident.

Eat Fresh, Eat Local: A History of Urban Gardening & Food Education

By Natalie Garza



Monica Pope is an advocate for locally grown foods, which she serves at her restaurant, t'afia.

Photo courtesy of Monica Pope.

There is a movement that places importance on knowing where food comes from for nutritious, environmental, and economic reasons. This trend has taken many forms, such as community gardening, schools gardens, farmers' markets, and even restaurants that support local growers. The UH-Oral History of Houston collects interviews that document this endeavor. Below are excerpts from a few conducted by UH graduate students that provide a glimpse into this growing movement.

Houston Special Gardening Program

In 1976, Arnold Brown became a county extension agent in Harris County under the Houston Special Gardening Program (six cities program) that was created out of Agricultural Extension. The program he ran served an estimated 10,000 families over a twelve year period. Eventually, the six cities program expanded to twenty-two cities. Brown's interview with Leigh Cutler on January 31, 2006, provides an account of Houston urban gardening and farmers' markets that have roots in the 1970s.



Two members sit in the Alabama Community allotment Garden. On the right is Warren Christian, one of the co-founders of the Alabama Garden.

All photos courtesy of Urban Harvest unless otherwise noted.

ARNOLD BROWN [AB]: [There] was a federal program that had been created out of the [1976] Congress by Frederick [W.] Richmond, who was a congressman from New York, and it was to create a community garden program. ... They called it backyard gardening, directed toward urban and minority populations, and there [were] six cities at the time that they made the appropriations to. I was selected to become the director of the project in Houston. ... Houston was the most effective [of the six cities] program ... It was ranked on the basis of change in knowledge and skills and the impact the program had on communities. ...

Gerald Hines, the developer, worked with us on creating a farmers' market in Old Market Square on Fridays ... This was in probably 1988 to 1990. We set up downtown. The agriculture commissioner, John Hightower, set up [weekly] farmers' markets located off of Scott Street just across from the University of Houston, and Cleveland, that allowed not only home gardeners, but producers in the area who grew extra crops and even crops for commercial outlets. It was

set up on Saturday morning from 7:30 to about 11:00. ... That ended because [of the] seasons, and you may have one month of available produce, and then you wouldn't have any.

LEIGH CUTLER [LC]: What was the involvement by government?

AB: [Mickey Leland] was very instrumental in working with the U.S. Congress and ensuring our appropriation was available, ... because some [congressmen] felt like, "Hey, this may be a waste of time, waste of money." ... Mickey Leland and Barbara Jordan [were] very strong advocates, and knew the benefits that it was providing to their constituents.

LC: What about [efforts] of the inner city?

AB: In the Fourth Ward area, ... we set up a large space, and we would design [it so that] everybody would have their own plot in the garden area. I think it's just a sense of pride ... it created a whole new perception of the people's attitude in that community. At that time, the Vietnamese had moved into the complex, and they really understood gardening ... and every unit they lived in, there was a garden in their unit.

LC: Why are people so dedicated to community gardening?

AB: You thought [that] you were just doing a job, [but you're] actually changing the quality of life and it's carrying through generations, and that's a good thing.

Urban Harvest

As urban gardening caught on, it moved from government sponsorship to the formation of local non-profits. Under the Interfaith Ministries Hunger Coalition [formerly Metropolitan Ministries], Dr. Bob Randall assisted with the establishment of community gardens to supply the food pantries. He realized that these early gardens struggled because many people lacked the education of how to grow vegetables, and this idea formed the basis for what would become Urban Harvest. Others involved in founding Urban Harvest included: Suzie Fisher, George McAfee, Jacqueline Batisse, Ellen Mitchell, Mark Cotham, Leonel Castillo, Terry Hershey, and Wendy Kelsey.



Dr. Bob Randall speaks at Alabama Garden with Mark Bowen, current executive director of Urban Harvest (sitting), 2010.

Urban Harvest serves as a resource for community gardens with whatever problems they have, including starting a garden, consulting, education, and support. Leigh Cutler interviewed Bob Randall on December 7, 2005.

BOB RANDALL [BR]: I started working for Urban Harvest the day it was created in May of 1994, [one of the] official founders of the organization. I had been doing similar work at the Interfaith Hunger Coalition, on staff since February of 1988, and I was a volunteer starting the first of March 1987. ...

The main mission of the Interfaith Hunger Coalition was to combat hunger in metro Houston ... It helped start the Houston food bank and the system of food pantries that exist today. In 1986, I think ... the Texas and Houston economy was at its thirty or forty- or fifty-year low, and approximately one million emergency food requests were received in '86 or '87. The efforts [of] food drives [were] falling way short. They had people in need, a lot of children, a lot of elderly. There just simply wasn't enough food.

They went to essentially a desperate measure is what I would call it. They decided they might try to grow food. They knew that ... this was a longer-run strategy of trying to actually produce food for the hungry. But that's only one of several different influences [of gardening in Houston]. A second one is that there was a whole parallel group of people who were concerned about the use of pesticides in synthetic fertilizers, on our habitat and our environment. ... If you go back into the roots of the community gardening movement, they come out of these two different traditions.

LC: Is [the issue of food security] different in Houston?

BR: No, the whole country's got this problem. But [in Houston] it's particularly egregious because we have lots of land, and we have a twelve-month growing season. ... I had begun to see this as a school system problem. We needed to build a school system for learning gardening. In a year's time, my view of what we were doing just totally changed. ...



Children hold up their sweet potato harvest at the Sutton Elementary school garden.

We made a number of interesting accomplishments [with Interfaith Hunger Coalition], and we built the program to something over forty gardens in those seven years, ... [but] we found that we needed to start an independent organization in order to grow and develop, by making the key deci-

sions ourselves, rather than burden Interfaith Ministries. ...

[Urban Harvest is] probably the fourth biggest community garden program in North America in terms of numbers of gardens, and we're probably the largest school gardening program in the world. ... I have said a number of times that it's a human right. You should be able to get educated about what you can do with land so that you can be productive, creative, and sustainable. It may not be as important as learning to read a book, but it's darn close to as important. It should be on the U.N. list somewhere in human rights.

Travis Elementary School Garden

Like Bob Randall, Margaret Blackstone felt passionate about school gardening and began her work at Travis Elementary with a federal grant acquired in 1985. Her experience provides a history of efforts and possibilities within school gardening programs before organizations like Urban Harvest picked up the initiative almost ten years later. Travis Elementary eventually became a member of Urban Harvest and Ms. Blackstone taught courses for the organization. Leigh Cutler interviewed her on February 27, 2006.



Travis Elementary school garden, 2004.

LC: Can you tell me how you started the school garden at Travis Elementary?

MARGARET BLACKSTONE [MB]: To the best of my recollection, I applied in the fall of 1985. ... Travis Elementary was a very small school, and we were looking to integrate curriculum with something outside, and so I just applied for the grant, never thinking we'd get it, and we got it.

LC: What did you do with the food that the kids grew?

MB: Each classroom had its own plot, depending on what they needed in the curriculum. In the fall, my teacher partner and I would go from Hispanic culture into Native Americans into a little study of Thanksgiving, so we would always plant New World plants in the garden: peppers and tomatoes and squash and things like that, that had to do with what the Native Americans ate. ... One time one of our teacher's sons got married, and he married a girl whose father was a cotton farmer, so in the spring, late spring, we planted cotton in the whole garden, and it grew over the summer, and in the fall we picked it, and every child in the



Saturday at the Eastside Farmers' Market.

school spun and wove some thread and wove a little bookmark. At the 500th anniversary of Columbus discovering America, we all planted corn and got up there and boiled corn and stuff. People had pizza gardens; in other words, the ingredients for a pizza.

LC: What sparked this idea [of a school garden] originally for you?

MB: I had gardened my whole life. When I came to the school, I lived in the neighborhood ... and it was a fairly run-down neighborhood that was not going anywhere, and the school was very small ... We didn't have any science lab or anything like that. It was just kind of a way to give kids experiences. ...

At one point, when they were reworking the school, they were going to get rid of the garden. ... A man came that they hired to do some work on the Sparks Park [around 1993 or 1994], which was what we were getting, and we were going to have to move one of the temporary buildings into the garden area ... And when he saw the garden, he just went crazy, and there wasn't any way that they were going to get rid of that garden then. ... He [said] that it was a very European idea. It seems like now there's an explosion [of school gardens].

LC: How did the garden change the school and the students?

MB: I think the garden was a part of that [change] because it was such an important thing to the teachers. If it hadn't been important to them, it would not have lasted. They kept finding new ways to use it and incorporate it into what they were doing. ... I think the garden lifted the school, and the school lifted the garden. It was kind of a mutual thing there, yes. But it was because of the personnel at the school.

Eastside Market

From school gardens to local farmers' markets, urban gardening continues to impact the Bayou City. Pamela Walker helped to organize Houston's Bayou City Farmers Market, now the Eastside Market, for Urban Harvest in 2001 and continued in that position for four years. She has a book titled, *Growing Good Things to Eat in Texas*. Andrew Reiser interviewed her on September 30, 2010.

PAMELA WALKER [PW]: My maternal grandparents were sharecroppers. ... We visited many weekends and I spent a lot of time with them in the summers and holidays and vacations. They always had a vegetable garden. ... I discovered not everyone's grandparents lived in the country, and that they didn't get to bathe in a tin tub on the porch and they couldn't walk to the well for water ... It just had a huge impact on my connection to food. I've always known where food comes from. As an adult, I've always had an organic vegetable garden. I've always had a compost pile. I've always cooked. ...

I organized a small market in Schulenburg in 1999 and 2000 ... About 2001, the Schulenburg market kind of peters out and [the board of] Urban Harvest, which I had been a member of, but never actively involved in, made one of its projects organizing a farmers' market. I was asked to participate in that effort. ... I ended up chairing the market organizing committee and overseeing the initial development of the market.

ANDREW REISER [AR]: Was Houston asking for a farmers' market at the time?

PW: It was my own passion for farmers' markets and local farming and food communities. I think some people in Houston were onto it. But no, it was not like the whole city was clamoring for a farmers' market. I wanted one here because I knew from my travels just how wonderful they were elsewhere. I often thought if only I could have a farmers' market like the Santa Fe farmers' market or the Union Square Green Market. Why can't we have that here?

AR: Where did the book come in?

PW: When we go out of the way to buy from farmers, the kind of stewardship portrayed in my book is what we are supporting. Just to reveal how high the stakes are, what is involved, that if we want real farming and real food to survive in this country, we need to buy from local farmers and help create more of a market or all of our food will come from China, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia or Monsanto. Those were my main motivations to show pro-

spective growers that yes this is done and to reveal to people who care about what they eat and care about the survival of farming and good stewardship in our area or whatever area it is we live in that is supporting local farmers is really an obligation in my view.

AR: What is next?

PW: We need to work on, how do we get the food of the farmers we have into more varied local markets? Not just farmers' markets, but chefs, restaurants, schools, institutions. ... We need to develop local farm and food communities. We need to go beyond farmers' markets. Dear as they are to my heart.

Monica Pope and t'afia

Monica Pope took on the task set out by Pamela Walker, as a local chef and restaurant owner. The Midtown Farmers' Market ran out of her restaurant t'afia for a number of years. Pope appeared in Bravo's season two of *Top Chef Masters*, and through her role in the foundation, *Recipe for Success*, she participated in the launch of Michelle Obama's initiative to fight childhood obesity called, "Chef's move to schools" at the White House. Both through the farmers' market and her use of locally grown products in her restaurant, Monica Pope has worked to support local growers. Matthew Campbell interviewed her on November 2, 2010.



MATTHEW CAMPBELL [MC]: What is your earliest memory of food?

MONICA POPE [MP]: What I write about is this box that my grandmother would send us — my mother's birthday was in October, we would get maybe something in October, something for the holidays. My grandmother would make kolaches and shishki and that kind of stuff. ... For us being in Houston, it was kind of special ... In some ways, a lot of what I still do around here has some connection to where I came from.

MC: Was [the Midtown Farmers' market] a creation out of the restaurant?

MP: I started in '92 with my first restaurant, the Quilted Toque, and had some idea in my head when I was a teenager that I'm going to come back to Houston and open a restaurant and change the way Houston eats. ... I didn't ever really know what that meant ... "what does it mean for me personally, what does it mean for me professionally, what does it mean to my community?" ...

There was a pivotal moment when Urban Harvest asked

if I would host this thing in my restaurant [Boulevard Bistrot] on a Monday [in 1994 or 1995]. It turned out the first time farmers and growers got together with chefs and then got together with regular people. Literally, the first time this has ever happened in the history of Houston, Texas. That's how they look back on it — "Do you remember that day, Monica?" Well I do, but I didn't realize how significant it was to them, and then to me. I started putting [local growers] on the blackboard and what not. ...

Later I had a farmer come to me and say, "Monica, you know, why can't y'all do the farmers' market inside of t'afia?" ... I'll be darned she got us the certification, and a week after t'afia opened, the Midtown Farmers' Market thing happened. ... I do this local market tasting menu. I was the first person in the city to ever do something like that where you don't just have a chef's tasting menu, you have a local market tasting menu. All this stuff is from the local farmers' market.


MC: Could you define the idea of food sustainability and how you fit in?

MP: In my own sort of bastardized way, every single decision that I've made essentially since I came to t'afia [is about sustainability] ... We filter water ... We recycle everything ourselves and have been for years. Our biodiesels, fryer oil becomes biodiesel. The list goes on, and on, and on. Living wages, this sort of schedule that we have, five nights, you know we do two weeks paid vacation every year, you know we all shut down. That's a big deal. It's a paradigm shift of what is really important. It's important that we come in and worked the best shifts that we can work, we go home, and we have our families. We don't work double, triple jobs. ...

In terms of the plate ... we took a third of the plate off and said, "let's make it more sustainable. Let's do a sustainable portion of six ounces." The biggest portion I have is a bison rib eye that's ten to twelve, by the time it's cooked it's a ten ounce portion. That's not standard out there. I have other chefs go, "well Monica, my customers won't take less than eight ounces, nine, ten ..." and guess what happens — it gets thrown away. ...

I mean it's just a slew of things, but the main thing is just at every juncture you're asking yourself, "is it sustainable?" Because you still have to be a viable company, you have to make money, and be able to stay in business. But every relationship you have, does it work to finish a cycle of waste? Or something that you are producing — does it come back, somehow in a good way?

MC: What are your future plans, for the farmers' market and for t'afia?

MP: To remind people that food should taste really good, it should be really good for us, and it shouldn't be devastating on our environment, it shouldn't be. We should have this beautiful relationship with it ... 

t'afia is located at 3701 Travis St. For more information, menus, and hours, visit www.tafia.com or call 713-524-6922.

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Annette Finnigan: Building an Enlightened Community

By Betty Trapp Chapman



Portrait of Annette Finnigan by John Wells, 1937.

Annette Finnigan—energetic suffrage leader, astute businesswoman, visionary philanthropist—became involved in many aspects of Houston’s development. Her contributions have had a significant impact on its citizens. Yet today few Houstonians are familiar with her name.

Annette was born in 1873 in West Columbia, Texas, to Katherine McRedmond and John Finnigan.¹ John, orphaned as a young boy of fourteen, was forced to leave school to earn his livelihood. A thirst for knowledge and a tireless energy for hard work, however, led him to become a successful merchant dealing in animal hides. Known as a democratic-minded person, John Finnigan believed in the worth of all individuals and in doing what he could to help others, and he instilled these admirable qualities in his daughter, Annette. In 1874, the Finnigan family moved to Houston, where Annette and her sisters, Katherine and Elizabeth, attended the newly-established public schools.²

By 1888, the flourishing family business, John Finnigan Hide Company, had offices in Houston and New York City. To oversee the New York office, and possibly to expand the educational opportunities for his daughters, Finnigan moved his family to the East, although they claimed Texas residency. Annette, who had not yet graduated from the Houston Normal and High School, studied at Tilden Seminary in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, and in the fall of 1888 entered Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Undoubtedly, her years at Wellesley profoundly influenced her. Her curriculum reveals that, while she showed an interest in languages, rhetoric, and art history, she also studied the sciences. She belonged to the campus art society and participated in the Wellesley Bicycle Club, a symbol of “emancipated womanhood.” Wellesley’s unique policy of employing an all-female faculty provided strong role models and affirmed the concept of feminine leadership. Class elections and assemblies educated women in organization, leadership, cooperation, and articulating their views.³ This represented a new experience for females and later proved invaluable to Annette.

The most significant issue during Finnigan’s years at Wellesley was likely woman suffrage. Even though early on women’s colleges did not encourage participation in suffrage activities for fear it jeopardized female education, Annette’s introduction to suffrage occurred during her freshman year

when she heard an eminent suffragist speak in Boston. By Annette's senior year, five hundred Wellesley students and professors declared themselves in favor of woman suffrage.⁴

After graduation in 1894, Annette returned to New York and became involved in the family business. Intent on developing his daughter's capabilities, John Finnigan left her in charge when he traveled outside New York. In a letter to a cousin, Annette stated that "running a business takes an immense amount of experience and the responsibility worries me terribly." However, as she gained experience, more responsibility was entrusted to her. In 1896, while the Finnigans were still in New York, they were approached about selling their Houston home site on San Jacinto Street near the courthouse to make way for a commercial building. Believing that the house had architectural and historical value, Annette advertised and sold the home, which was moved to an outlying area that became Montrose. Today, The Heritage Society operates the 1850 Nichols-Rice-Cherry House as a house museum in Sam Houston Park.⁵ Unknowingly, Annette Finnigan preserved a part of Houston's heritage to enlighten future generations—an endeavor she expanded and refined in later years.

By early 1903, the Finnigan family had returned to Houston where Annette and her sisters initiated the city's suffrage campaign at a meeting in their home. The attendees formed the Houston Equal Suffrage League, the first such organization in Texas since the statewide movement lapsed in 1896. Undaunted by ridicule and a less-than-serious report of the meeting in the *Houston Chronicle*, the organization attempted to have a woman appointed to the Houston School Board. While the effort received attention and many Houstonians approved, the mayor ignored the petitions and appointed three men. Nevertheless, Finnigan saw their efforts as a positive step because they focused attention on the needs of the public schools and "the importance of selecting persons of the highest intelligence, broadest culture and noblest character to guide the education of the city's children."⁶

John Finnigan died in 1909, leaving a sizeable estate. His will specified that because of "her superior business experience and tact," Annette should assume all responsibility for administering his estate. This included the hide business, which had offices in twenty-three Texas locations, and the Houston Packing Company, the largest independent packing house in the South. Her primary responsibility, however, was the Hotel Brazos Company, which she had served as president since 1907. Fronting five hundred feet on the street, the hotel was one of the city's finest and advertised that "every facility of modern hotel life is found at the Brazos and ladies traveling alone are under the special protection of the management."⁷ Finnigan applied the same strength of purpose and efficient manner to her business dealings that she had to her suffrage activities. Undoubtedly, her role as a successful businesswoman proved enlightening to a community, which heretofore was dominated by male business leaders.

In 1912, the Houston suffrage organization was revived as the Women's Political Union under the leadership of Finnigan. Two years later she became president of the Texas Woman Suffrage Association, headquartered at the Hotel

Brazos, and the number of Texas clubs increased from eight to twenty-one. Recognizing that suffrage depended on submitting a proposed constitutional amendment to the electorate, Finnigan led in developing the campaign. In a letter to every legislative candidate, she stated, "It is manifestly unfair and un-American that the political liberties of one-half of our citizens should be denied by the will of an indifferent or adverse legislature." She and her co-workers zealously lobbied the legislators, and Finnigan solicited more female participation by traveling across Texas and conducting meetings, as one newspaper reported, with "determined logic and quiet faith." Proudly she carried the banner of her cause and refused to be intimidated when that cause was ridiculed or refuted. Although the electorate did not vote on the suffrage amendment, Finnigan declared, "We have not been defeated. Victory is only delayed." Although she relinquished the state presidency in 1915, she remained in contact with her successor, offering advice on strategy and organization. Ironically, just as the campaign began to gain momentum, offering excitement and hope, Annette Finnigan suffered a serious stroke.⁸

Although Finnigan became physically impaired, requiring her to sacrifice her roles as businesswoman and activist, she was not deterred. Her interest in suffrage never faltered, and she continued supporting it financially. Further, her vast intellect, deep interest in the enlightenment of others, and love for her hometown led her on a quest that continued for a decade, and the results of which lasted far longer.

Houston's Museum of Fine Arts incorporated in 1925, having occupied its new home a year earlier. The Depression



Grave Stela for a Woman, Greek, mid-4th century BC, marble; upper fragment of a grave monument, revealing two women and an infant in a pose of serenity.

Photo courtesy of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston;
Gift of Miss Annette Finnigan.

made building a permanent collection difficult when the institution depended on donations. Before travelling abroad in 1931, Finnigan contacted Director James Chillman and asked if she might find antiquities for the young museum. Thus began an ideal collaboration. Chillman recalled, “She would always ask me what I would want ... rather than imposing her ideas on the museum.” Finnigan tirelessly researched and located the desired objects, which she purchased and donated. On Finnigan’s first foray abroad in search of antiquities, she journeyed to Egypt. The extensive assemblage of objects sent to the museum included ceramics, carvings, a gilded mummy mask of a princess, a papyrus sheet from the Book of the Dead, and a dedication stone of the XII Dynasty. An alabaster plate (2665-2155 BC) was a particularly fine example illustrating Egyptian life over 4,000 years. Over the next five years, Finnigan traveled

in search of treasures. She purchased approximately three hundred objects that were unpacked at the Houston museum with great anticipation. They included textiles—tapestries, rugs, and wall hangings—from India, Spain, Greece, and Persia. She acquired a collection of Byzantine crucifixes along with twenty pieces of sixteenth and seventeenth century furniture from Spain. Several pieces were loaned to the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts for a Spanish art exhibit at the State Fair of Texas in 1939, including a 1266 AD memorial stone with crucifix, a carved wood Madonna, altar candlesticks, and, interestingly, dueling pistols.⁹

Although Finnigan acquired Grecian objects on earlier trips, in 1936 she returned to Greece where she assembled her most valuable antiquities collection. When the shipment arrived in Houston, Finnigan noted that the Greek government reclaimed many of the priceless art objects before she got them out of the country. The oldest piece was a small marble statuette dating to 2500 BC, considered the finest product of the Early Bronze Age and typical of the primitive pieces found on the Greek islands before sculpture was recognized as a great independent art. Other objects included animals of terra cotta; gold and ivory jewelry; terra cotta funeral wreaths; religious icons in wood, brass and stone; and lithokoi or oil jars used by the ancient Greeks during funeral rites. An alabaster hydria, originally used to carry spring water and later placed in famous tombs as a ceremonial vase, was excavated near Athens just three years before Finnigan’s visit. Perhaps the acquisition receiving the most public interest was a gold myrtle wreath (c. 330-250 BC). Wreaths made from plants like myrtle, laurel, or ivy were awarded to athletes, soldiers, and royalty to show love and appreciation. By 300 BC, these wreaths were being cut from thin gold sheets. Too fragile to be worn, they were buried with the dead as symbols of life’s victories. When Chillman had asked Finnigan to find a small piece of Grecian marble, her research discovered the upper-portion of a fourth century marble grave stela, believed to be from Athens, where the classical style developed. This beautiful example of serenity became one of the museum’s most prized possessions, according to Chillman.¹⁰

As the museum prepared the artifacts for exhibition, its president George A. Hill, Jr., spoke about Finnigan’s contributions, “The knowledge with which she collects and the spirit in which her presentations are made are the most interesting events in the life of the museum. She is a connoisseur of art and due to her forethought there are many objects in the museum today that might otherwise have been seen in the large museums of Europe.” Finnigan, indeed, had asserted that she wanted Houston’s museum to achieve the excellence of those in cities like Berlin and London. To accomplish this, Finnigan approached her endeavor as an academic one and sought expert assistance. Sir Arthur Evans, the famous restorer and excavator of King



Book of Hours, *Franco-Flemish, 15th century, illuminated manuscript in Latin on vellum.*

Photo courtesy of Annette Finnigan Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.



Model Boat, Egyptian, 2661-1784 BC, painted wood; funerary boats were used in burial practices to hasten the journey of the deceased into the after life.

Photo courtesy of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gift of Miss Annette Finnigan.

Minos's Palace at Knossos in Crete, advised her in selecting seventeen Grecian vases from the Archaic period when the Greek civilization was shaping itself and producing extraordinary pottery. In 1937, the noted English painter, John Wells, did a portrait of Finnigan, which was presented to the museum by her sisters. Labeled "The Lady in Green" by museum patrons, it hung there for many years as a testimony to her intelligent and generous giving. Annette Finnigan, donor of approximately six hundred artifacts, established a precedent that others followed, enabling the museum to become a major cultural force in Houston.¹¹

The Houston Public Library also benefited from Finnigan's philanthropy. Her long-standing interest stemmed from her father's generosity in establishing Houston's first public library and from her study of the classics at Wellesley. In 1929, shortly after Houston's new downtown library opened, Finnigan decided to gather a sample of books showing how the art of bookmaking developed. She spent two years visiting the leading book houses in London, Munich, Budapest, and Constantinople, where she assembled sixty-five items dating from the twelfth to seventeenth centuries. They include illuminated manuscripts printed and painted by hand; books printed during the early centuries of machine printing when hand illumination was still employed; scrolls; sheepskin rolls bearing religious messages; and a group of first editions, remarkable for their fine printing and binding. In our age of rapid-fire print production, it is difficult to realize how limited books were before and during the Middle Ages. For more than six centuries, monasteries were primarily responsible for painstakingly producing duplicates of religious and classical literature by hand. As a result, only the wealthy could afford these treasures.¹²

The illuminated manuscripts selected by Finnigan are unbelievably beautiful. In art, the term "illumination" denotes decoration of written or printed text by lettering in gold ink upon a tinted page. Gradually it became customary to enlarge the initial letter of a page or paragraph. In



Funeral Amphora, Greek (Attic), 700 BC, ceramic; jar used for storing wine, grain, or oil and placed in burials as gifts for eternity.

Photo courtesy of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston;
Gift of Miss Annette Finnigan.



Myrtle Wreath, Greek (Hellenistic), c. 350-250 BC, gold; replica of victory wreaths awarded to athletes or soldiers.

Photo courtesy of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston;
Gift of Miss Annette Finnigan.


the more ornamental stages, the text is sometimes framed in a wide band showing birds, fruits, and flora upon a golden ground. Despite the difficulty of laying gold leaf on vellum, after many centuries, the gold work is smooth, flat, and brilliant as if it were applied only recently. In addition to gold leaf, lapis-lazuli, camine, and ultramarine make the pages glow with splendor. The Franco-Flemish copy of the *Book of Hours* is, perhaps, the most lavishly illuminated book in the collection. It contains six pages of miniatures within a framework of flowers, fruit, and birds upon a gold ground, in addition to twenty-two smaller paintings characteristic of the Flemish attention to detailing. A Doctor of Laws diploma from Padua University, dated March 30, 1678, features illuminated borders and a portrait painting of the degree's recipient, Vincente de Dominis. Also of particular interest is a fourteenth century Latin Vulgate Bible, written in small Gothic characters on vellum and belonging originally to William of Orange.¹³

Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1496 revolutionized bookmaking, but printed books were still illuminated by hand. Although most of the books and manuscripts are religious, as was customary in the Middle Ages, the collection also contains works of Erasmus, Boccaccio, Dante, Homer, Cicero, Petrarch, Caesar, and others. In the edition of Caesar's *Commentaries*, printed in Venice in 1513, the first page of each book is hand-illuminated with floral borders. Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey* is a two-volume edition printed in the same manner with a handsome French binding of red Morocco. The use of composite woodcuts

introduced a new era in printed illustrations for the third edition of Terence's *Comedies*, printed in 1499. At the time Finnigan acquired this valuable piece for the library, the only other known copy was in the British Museum and it lacked the frontispiece illustration of the Houston copy. When Finnigan presented this collection to the Houston Public Library, it was the only one of its kind in Texas.

Finnigan's contributions to her hometown reached beyond her artistic and literary gifts. Her long-standing altruism led her in 1939 to give eighteen acres to the City of Houston for a park for its black citizens. Realizing that the segregated city obviously lacked such recreational facilities, Finnigan sought to remedy this and requested that the park be named for her father. In a letter written eight months before her death, she expressed concern about the grounds being laid out properly. Today John Finnigan Park is a center of community activity for Fifth Ward Houstonians.¹⁴

Annette Finnigan died on July 17, 1940, after a long bout with cancer. Her impact on Houston lived on, however, as she had remembered its citizens in her will, which provided \$25,000 to establish the Annette Finnigan Endowment Fund at the Houston Public Library. She requested that "the income thereof be applied to the purchase of books and maps of special interest, including books and maps relating to the history of Texas, the southwest and Mexico." The initial purchase in 1943 secured two items: A set of twenty-five maps of Hispanic America and the first sixty-eight volumes of the *Lithographic Library of Congress Catalog of Printed Books*. The library acquired the entire 160-volume set over the next two years. Each year, income from this fund continues to enhance the library's historical collections with items that might otherwise be too costly to obtain. In reporting her death, the *Houston Post* remembered Finnigan as "one who served faithfully many noble causes and left her home city and her country better because of her life." A resolution passed by the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts of Houston stated that "the Annette Finnigan Collection will rekindle in each successive generation a deep seated gratitude for Miss Finnigan's strong public spirit and self-dedication to the higher form of artistic expression, concrete examples of which will serve as a perpetual monument to her memory."¹⁵

While Annette Finnigan's name may be largely unknown in Houston today, her legacy is a more enlightened community where we find patrons of the arts, scholars in research, citizens at leisure, and females in roles of leadership—all spiritual heirs of a remarkable woman. 

Many of the pieces donated by Annette Finnigan are on display at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, at 1001 Bissonnet. Visit www.mfah.org or call 713-639-7300.

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 immediate past chair of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission.

“Any day above ground is a good one”

A Conversation with the National Museum of Funeral History’s Director, Genevieve Keeney

Robert L. Waltrip founded the National Museum of Funeral History in 1992 in order to “educate the public and preserve the heritage of death care.” Waltrip’s family founded the Heights Funeral Home in Houston, Texas, and Waltrip became director upon his father’s untimely death. He expanded the business, Service Corporation International, into what is today, the largest funeral service corporation in the country. Having witnessed the variety of traditions, customs, and rituals that accompany funerals and the funeral industry, Waltrip felt it was important to open a museum to showcase how they have evolved over time.

On September 20, 2008, Genevieve Keeney, the director of the National Museum of Funeral History, sat down with Anna Burke Herrera to discuss the history of Houston’s funeral museum.

Anna Burke Herrera (AB): What are some of the more popular exhibits that you have in the museum?

Genevieve Keeney (GK): “The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” ... We have a TV that displays the changing of the guard, which is a very ceremonial period that happens throughout the day there. It is very structured and disciplined and touching. ... Another popular one is the “Presidential Museum,” [which] displays all the different presidents throughout time starting with Washington. Of course we don’t have [artifacts for] all of them, but we do have the memorial folders or the newspaper articles or some of the actual artifacts from that president’s funeral. We do have some of the artifacts from some of the most recent presidents, and we are expanding that now, so that we can make

This authentic uniform was worn by a member of The Old Guard while on duty at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C.

All photos courtesy of the National Museum of Funeral History.

room for Gerald R. Ford and for our future presidents, President Clinton and the Bushs. Another one is “Funerals of Famous.” ... We do have Princess Grace of Monaco’s hearse. That was put on loan to us. Then we have different memorial cards and folders that are handed out at the ceremonies of the different funerals of the famous. Of course our hearses are always popular too because we have a large collection of hearses throughout time [including the one used in the funerals for presidents Ford and Reagan] ...

AB: What were the early hearses like?

GK: [Our] original hearse is believed to be from the 1800s and it is horse drawn, of course, it has glass sides to it, and it has what they called feather plumes that are on the top ... More plumes [meant] that you had [a] higher status in society ... The black

plumes were always reserved for the men and the white for the women and children. It’s got curtains around it and [it is only] big enough for pretty much a casket. ...

When they changed from horse drawn hearses into motorized hearses, basically what they did when the Ford pick-up truck came out, they would take the top off the horse drawn carriage and they would [put it on] the back of the truck ...

AB: What cultures does the museum cover?

GK: It covers the American culture of course mainly. ... But we do have a Japanese hearse, we have two German hearses, and now we have an international portion [of the museum] that we have just created. That covers Italy, of course because of Rome, “Celebrating the Life and Deaths of the Popes,” and we are also now covering Mexico. We have Ghana, West Africa.

AB: What are some of the most unusual exhibits that you have had on display here? I noticed that you had the Snow White casket.

GK: Yeah, [we have] the Snow White, [but] the money casket gets a lot of publicity. The money casket was a big hit



The Presidential Exhibit has an exact replica of the Derringer pistol used by John Wilkes Booth in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.



because it just shows that you *can* take it with you. [People] say, “You can’t take your money with you.” But yes, in retrospect you can, and somebody actually had their money encased into a casket. A little over \$1,000 was in it originally. It actually had money in the inner lining as well, but that got stolen. [*Houston, Over the Top* with Debra Duncan – 2007 to 2008] did a segment [about] the most expensive funeral. We are not allowed to divulge that information because of client privilege confidentiality.

AB: Could you tell me about your timeline exhibit, begin-



You CAN take it with you! This custom-made casket features authentic dollar bills and coins.

ning with the Egyptian exhibit?

GK: Embalming started with the Egyptians. They master crafted the technique of preserving the body. ... Thomas Holmes, who is the father of American embalming, ... was a doctor. His main goal was to come up with a technique to ... preserve the body long enough to get the soldiers from the Civil War off the battlefield and back home for a proper burial. ... They used the gravity bottles to get the fluid into the body. Now we have the machines that do it for us. Once Dr. Holmes created the concept and came up with the idea, then it became common practice. Now-a-days, with the increased transportation abilities there are no embalmers on the battlefield. Sometimes a body can take the fluid very well and you can open it up twenty years [later] and



A replica of King Tut's sarcophagus.

they are still there. ... It’s the sealed gasket casket. It’s put into a vault. It’s kept from any air or water or any kind of element being able to get to it. A whole bunch of different elements combine to really preserve a body in pristine state, it’s not just the embalming fluid alone.

AB: Can you tell me about the three person casket?

GK: The three person casket was designed for a husband and wife who had lost their child, and they were so grief stricken that they wanted to follow the child in death. They went to the nearest casket maker and asked him to please create a triple casket large enough for the three of them to be buried together. They were going to do a murder/suicide. ... By the time the casket was near completion, the grief period had passed and the mother and father went their separate ways. The casket was never picked up. When the casket company closed, they still had this casket in their inventory and they donated it to us, along with the story.

AB: Do you have any glass caskets here?

GK: Yes we do have two glass caskets. We have the replica of the casket [from] the movie, *Sleeping Beauty*. Then we have another glass casket made of very thick glass. That was basically a concept that someone had created, ... [but] the idea never took off. I think a lot of people were leery of its functionality.

AB: Can you tell me about your 1860 German Glaswagen



Known as the “Piscatory Ring” or “Ring of the Fisherman,” this replica of the gold ring seal of Pope Benedict XV is inscribed “Benedictus P.P. XV.” It features a bas relief depiction of St. Peter casting his net from a fishing boat, as was his occupation. Because the apostles were known as “fishers of men (Matthew 4:19),” the ring

signifies the role of St. Peter as the original head of the organized Catholic Church. Its origin dates back to 1265, and in modern times, the ring is used to seal important correspondence of the pope accompanied by his signature known as “briefs.”

Funeral Coach?

GK: We have this wonderful gentleman who is on our board, Buck Kamphausen, [who] collects cars and ... he has some of the German hearses. [The wheels] are not straight. They are angled so that the hearse can maneuver the cobblestones, [which was the only significant difference between American and European hearses.]

AB: You have the JFK “Eternal Flame” here I understand.

GK: It’s from the Arlington National Cemetery. They have the real one there, basically they switched [it] out when Mrs. Kennedy died. They had to unearth everything and they switched out all the mechanisms. ... It’s a more modern eternal flame that is sitting there and [we have] the old one. Arlington National Cemetery asked if we wanted it to put it in our Presidential exhibit. It is just a nice tribute to go along with [JFK’s replica] casket that we have.



The collection represents the single largest assemblage of fantasy coffins outside of Ghana. Each is designed to capture the essence of the departed - be it a character trait, an occupation, or a symbol of one's standing in the community. Ghana's most noted designer coffin maker, Kane Quaye, began crafting "Fantasy Coffins" more than thirty years ago at his dying uncle's request for a special coffin. Because his uncle was a fisherman, Quaye built him a coffin in the shape of a fishing canoe. The National Museum of Funeral History is the first to display these pieces as coffins instead of art.

AB: Can you tell me a little bit about the Pope exhibit?

GK: That is "Celebrating the Lives and Deaths of the Popes." It was inspired by ... the funeral of Pope John Paul II, the process of it, the ceremonial portion of it, and the whole fact that so many people were moved by it. We thought it would be really, really neat to do an exhibit ... to showcase such an extravagant event as that. I think that when people come to the museum they can actually relate to [the exhibit] because it affects the people in our time, something that they can feel and remember. It's kind of like the *Challenger* [space shuttle] or Princess Diana, ... something that people these days are familiar with. It's been three years in the making. It took two years to get approval from the Vatican so that they may open their doors to us and allow us to 1) get permission to even have this type of exhibit, and then 2) to be able to have access to some of the artifacts and the behind the scene photos ... so that we could actually do the exhibit justice and give it the respect and honor that it deserves.

AB: What is your "Reflections on the Wall" exhibit?

GK: The "Reflections on the Wall" ... traveled around the U.S. for eight years. It is now on permanent loan to us from the Smithsonian. [We have] the actual original photos that were taken at the dedication ceremony of the "Reflections of the Wall" for the Vietnam Memorial wall. That's how our museum got built by the generosity of the people saying "Here, I think this needs to be showcased rather than thrown away."

AB: Can you tell me about the museum consulting on several film, television, and print productions?

GK: A lot of our pieces have been rented out by some of the different producers ... for prop purposes. The pilot for *Six Feet Under* was one of the film productions that our museum was instrumental [in. We] helped them to name the funeral home. ... A lot of family homes are best known by the name of the owner. [We made] sure that the props that were within it, like the bottles and stuff like that, were correctly labeled and that they portrayed the correct information. *The Women of Independent Means* that was directed by Sally Fields, [we helped] her to do some informational portions within that movie. ... They consult to make sure that the information they are presenting is correct. We get a lot of people that call us - I have a book called *The History of American Funeral Directing*. That is my dictionary, or my bible, or my encyclopedia, if you will, to make sure that when people call and ask questions about certain things in history that we give them the accurate information.

AB: Are there any other exhibits you would like to talk about?

GK: The "Funeral Bus" I think is interesting. [It] was constructed in San Francisco, California. Instead of having that long drawn out funeral procession of cars, they create[d] a bus long enough to carry the body and the entire family. ... When it was going up the steep hills, ... the bus kind of tipped back and they realized it wasn't going to work.

Items showcased in "Celebrating the Lives and Deaths of the Popes" are: behind the scenes photos inside the altar of St. Peters; never before seen photos of Pope Pius; the sash of Pope John Paul II worn daily, stains and all; the original book of all the front pages of *Reservoir Romany*, the Vatican's newspaper; an original uniform from The Papal Gentleman and the Saviatti, the Pope's pallbearers; the prayer book from the funeral mass; a replica casket; and a replica of Pope John Paul II's crypt in The Gratta.

We had a *Wizard of Oz* exhibit that used to be up for the coroner, the little coroner guy — we have a mannequin. [Reopening in the “Thanks for the Memories” exhibit, summer 2012.] Basically it was just pictures of the movie *Wizard of Oz* and the coroner himself that went out and pronounced “the wicked witch is dead.” He did a signing of posters from the *Wizard of Oz* ... Death even happens in the Disney movies.

We have a nice collection of mourning clothing ... and a Rolls Royce hearse [now on display also] ...

AB: Does the museum offer workshops?

GK: I have a couple of workshops that I want to get going ... like “Day of the Dead.” I think it would be really neat to have a little workshop for the kids [to] make sugar skulls because then you are learning about the tradition of it and the significance of the sugar skull. I also want to do some grief workshops, bereavement workshops that allow people to come together in one location [and] realize they are not alone in their grief process. [I] want to have different workshops that allow people to come together as a community and realize that what they are going through is normal and is not affecting just them.

AB: Do you see a lot of emotional responses to some of your exhibits?

GK: A lot of times the emotion starts at the front door and they never come in. I have experienced that where some patrons were on a tour group, like a senior tour group and they weren’t told they were coming here and they drive in and they realize [it] and then they sit out front. ... Sometimes I’ll see it with parents. They will call ahead of time, “Is it okay for us to bring our kids.” I think a lot of it is just people don’t really understand what is really behind the walls. ... People will ask “Do you have bodies in there?” “No, we don’t have bodies in here.” Sometimes people think we are funeral home instead of a museum. ... But we get a lot of educational tours in here, schools, nursing schools. There is emotion, but I think a lot of it is the emotion stops the minute they walk in and they see it’s just a bunch of cars. ... Then all of a sudden their whole attitude changes and the emotions go on the wayside.

AB: Can you tell me a little bit about the demographics of your visitors?

GK: I was amazed at how many senior busses came. But very rarely do we see kids. I’ve been seeing more high schools come here because it is a potential profession, nurs-



Ofrendas (altars) were created during Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) to honor departed loved ones. Ofrendas were adorned with items reminiscent of their time on earth.

ing schools because it’s anatomical. ... Then, of course, we have the funeral students that come through here. ... We do have people who are travelers, tourists that come in, and we get them from all over.

AB: What is the most important thing that you want people who have never come to this museum to know?

GK: To know that death is not something to be feared, but something to be embraced and that it is a tradition, it is a custom and it should be celebrated by everybody. My goal is to be a death education advocate and utilize this as my platform to allow people to come here and learn how to embrace death, learn that death isn’t scary. [To] learn that this isn’t a bad place. Everybody is going to get effected by it one day. So why not learn on how to best handle it?

AB: What do you find is the most rewarding about being the director here?

GK: Being able to create new exhibits and really let people know that death is normal, death is natural, death is okay. ... My goal is to allow people to not only learn about other cultures, [but to] be more open to other people’s beliefs and their religions and their customs and courtesies surrounding the way that they celebrate death.

The National Museum of Funeral History is located at 415 Barren Springs Drive, Houston, Texas 77090. The museum is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Admission: Adults, \$10.00; Seniors/Veterans, \$9.00; Children (under 12), \$7.00; Children (under 3), free. For more information visit www.nmfh.org, or call 281-876-3063.

News Updates & Books *by Barbara Eaves*

GOOD BRICKS

The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance presented sixteen Good Brick Awards in one banner year for historic preservation — one of the busiest in the thirty-two years the group has recognized outstanding preservation projects and the people who make them happen. “Two showcase projects — the Julia Ideson Building and the Har-



Harris County Courthouse

ris County Courthouse – will set the standard for historic preservation in Houston for years to come,” said Ramona Davis, GHPA executive director. “And all were completed in a difficult economy.”

The Houston Public Library received the Stewart Title Award for the careful rehabilitation of the Spanish Colonial

Revival-styled Julia Ideson Building, as well as the installation of state-of-the-art archival facilities in a new wing built according to plans drawn in 1926. Gensler architects completed the renovation.

Harris County’s comprehensive restoration of the 1910 courthouse received GHPA’s President’s Award. This eight-and-a-half-year, \$65 million undertaking returned the courthouse to its original appearance after a 1950s “modernization” had removed many of the building’s original architectural elements. The Texas Historical Commission awarded \$5.5 million for this project in 2007 through its Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. PGAL was the prime architect, with ARCHITEXAS as preservation architect.

GHPA’s first ever Community Pillars awards were presented to Martha Turner of Martha Turner Properties and the Houston Astros’ former owner Drayton McLane, Jr. Mayor Annise Parker was recognized for her successful effort to strengthen Houston’s historic preservation ordinance.

Finally, eleven projects took home juried prizes: The City of Houston, for the green adaptive reuse of a 1924 warehouse as the Houston Permitting Center; Houston Public Library’s renovation and addition to the 1961 Oak Forest Neighborhood Library; Katie and Nick Johnson’s 1928 home in Boulevard Oaks; Carol and Daniel Price’s 1924 Henry Stude garage designed by Birdsall Briscoe in Shadyside; Minnette and Peter Boesel’s 1925 Craftsman duplex in Eastwood; Fred Sharifi’s 1930s commercial building in Montrose; Daughters of the Republic of Texas, San Jacinto Chapter, for stewardship of the 1936 Pioneer Log Cabin Museum; Glenwood Cemetery, Inc. for stewardship of Glenwood Cemetery; Lynn and Ty Kelly’s 1949 Usonian house in River Oaks; Nancy and Walter Bratic’s 1941 Georgian Revival home by Hamilton Brown in River Oaks; and Paula and Sam Douglass’s Georgian Revival home designed in 1936 by Birdsall Briscoe, also in River Oaks.

Julia Ideson Building



SAVE THESE DATES

MARCH 16-APRIL 21, 2012: William Reaves Gallery presents tintypes of cowboy subjects by Robb Kendrick – Texas artist and *National Geographic* photographer. Kendrick was already an accomplished photographer when he turned the lens of his re-worked tintype camera onto cowboy subjects – resulting in a treasure trove of gems capturing the rich traditions and storied legacy of these vanishing American ranch hands. For additional information, visit www.reavesart.com, email info@reavesart.com, call 713-521-7500, or drop by the gallery on Fridays or Saturdays (10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) at 2313 Brun Street, Houston, TX 77019.



APRIL 14, 2012: The 11th annual Battle of San Jacinto Symposium will be held at The Houston Club in downtown Houston, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Theme: “Linking the Present to the Past: The Hows and Whys of Preserving a Great Battlefield.” For information and to register,

visit www.sanjacintoconservancy.org.

APRIL 21, 2012: The San Jacinto Festival and Battle Re-enactment, San Jacinto Battleground, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Battle is re-fought at 3:00 p.m. Free to the public. www.sanjacinto-museum.org.

MAY 6, 2012: Seventh annual Houston History Road Rally sponsored by Houston Arts & Media. Teams of up to five people have two hours to solve puzzles that lead them to fifteen Inner-Loop landmarks. Top four teams win great prizes. Puzzle solving skills, navigational sense, and expert knowledge of Houston and its past are needed. Space is limited. Details at www.houstonartsandmedia.org.

JUNE 2, 2012: Second annual Houston History Association Conference: “Building Houston: From Allen’s Landing to the Moon.” It will be held at the Hilton University of Houston Hotel & Conference Center. More information at www.houstonhistoryassociation.org.

JULY 19-21, 2012: Sixteenth annual Angelina College Genealogy Conference in Lufkin, Texas. www.angelina.edu/genealogy/genealogy.html.

THROUGH APRIL 2012: The exhibit, “A Sea of Mud and a New Reality — Texas After the Battle of San Jacinto,” will be on display in the Research Room of the General Land Office Archives. Contact archives@glo.texas.gov or call 512-463-5277 for an appointment.

CHANGES



DEBRA BLACKLOCK-SLOAN was chosen as the 2012 Pioneering Lady of Distinction honoree by the Married Ladies Social Art & Charity Club, a group organized in 1902 to effect change through charitable, educational, and social services to the community. A historical researcher and genealogist, Blacklock-Sloan was chosen for her commitment to historic preservation in the African American community. She is a member of the Harris County Historical Commission and the Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission.

SUE KAUFMAN, manager of Clayton Center for Genealogical Research (Houston Public Library), has been elected the 2012 president of the Texas State Genealogical Society. She will preside over the state annual meeting scheduled for November 1-3 in Fort Worth.

DICK DICKERSON was named Foundation Archivist for the Nelda C. and H. J. Lutchter Stark Foundation in Orange, TX. For the past several years, he was the University Archivist in the University Libraries’ Special Collections Department, housed in the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston.

JULIE WILLIAMS has joined the City of Houston as planner of events held in the historic Julia Ideson Library Building, at 500 McKinney. This historic Houston landmark served as Houston’s central library from 1926 to 1976. A new state of the art archival wing now houses the vast resources of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center; the historic building has been immaculately restored and is available to be rented for such things as weddings, receptions, galas, corporate events and meetings. It accommodates groups of 50 to 450 people. Contact julie.williams@houston.tx.gov for more information.

SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND CONSERVANCY is the new name for the Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground, a group which works to preserve, protect and reclaim the battlefield. The SJBC recently raised more than \$750,000 to secure and begin conservation of an endangered nineteen acres — part of the route of the Runaway Scrape and, coincidentally, the staging site for the 1863 Battle of Galveston during the Civil War. This acreage will be rehabilitated as a model demonstration project and catalyst for restoration of the entire battleground and its vanishing native habitat.

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DOCUMENTARIES

Here are four documentaries now in production. Watch for them on PBS and elsewhere.

Jeff Mills's film documents the restoration of the 1910 Harris County Courthouse for the Documentary Alliance of Houston.

The Art of Architecture — Houston, produced by Jim Bailey and Kim Lykins for the Texas Foundation for the Arts, gives a captivating tour of Houston's architecture, visiting Pennzoil Place, the Gulf Building, the Enron buildings, the Astrodome, Julia Ideson Building, Bayou Bend, the tin can houses, and more. It includes interviews with Houston architectural "legends" Stephen Fox, Barry Moore, Bill Stern, Barrie Scardino, and others.

Houston Arts & Media is working on two full length films: *Home Front: Texas in WWII*, and *Houston Music in the 1960s*. These will be two in a series of seven feature length documentaries that will make up the entire *Birth of Texas* series — the first, *Houston: A Nation's Capital*, was released in 2011. Contact Mike Vance if you have first-hand knowledge, memories, or photographs that might contribute — or if you'd like to support this worthy effort financially. www.houstonartsandmedia.org.

OTHER NEWS

RICE IS 100 — Rice University does not officially celebrate its 100th birthday until October 12, 2012, but the school has been partying for the past year! Tours, competi-



tions, colloquia, music, lectures, you name it. Rice has launched a drive for \$24 million to build a home for the School of Continuing Studies (and celebrated with half a cake last November when it passed the

halfway mark). A sculpture by Bruce Wolfe of the university's first president, Edgar Odell Lovett, is to be unveiled in October. For current details of all this and more, check <http://centennial.rice.edu>. And books? Oh my, yes. Some are updated; others are new. They all are — or will be — available at the Rice Book Store; many at local bookstores as well. Here are titles. Those asterisked are available now:

**Edgar Odell Lovett and the Creation of Rice University: The Meaning of the New Institution*, by Edgar Odell Lovett, edited by John Boles. Paperback, \$8.99.

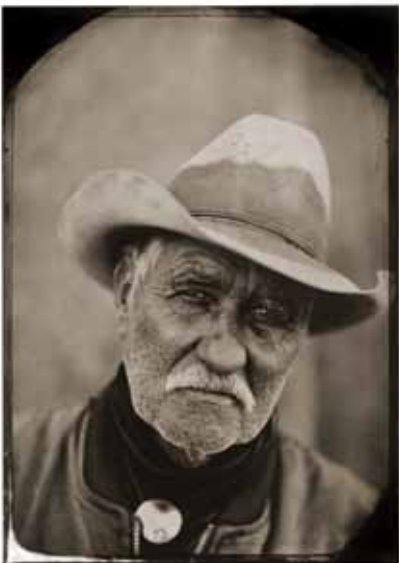
**Rice's Owls*, by Robert Flatt, with foreword by David W. Leebron. Hardback, \$34.95. Purchase on line at <http://www.riceowls.com/genrel/120911aaa.html>. Proceeds from this gorgeous collection of photographs of these magnificent birds go to Rice athletic scholarships.

A University So Conceived, by John Boles. Updated through 2010. Paperback, \$10.00.

William Marsh Rice and His Institute: A Biographical Study, by Andrew Forest Muir, updated by Randal L. Hall. \$25.00.

University Builder: Edgar Odell Lovett and the Founding of the Rice Institute, by John Boles, updated. Paperback, \$16.95.

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Rice University: One Hundred Years in Pictures, by Karen Hess Rogers, Lee Pecht, and Alan Harris Bath; commissioned by the Rice Historical Society, \$50.00. Due out October 2012.

Captain James A. Baker of Houston, 1857-1941, by Kate Sayen Kirkland, hardback. Due out September 2012.

HIWI: Rice. Paperback, \$25.

THE LANCASTER HOTEL CELEBRATES 85TH

ANNIVERSARY — The Lancaster Hotel, known as the Auditorium Hotel prior to extensive remodeling and name change in 1982, celebrates its 85th anniversary on November 21. That spurred one of the owners to dig into history books, old photos, maps, deeds, censuses, newspapers, and tax records to put together the history of the hotel and the two adjacent historic buildings to its north. The Lusk siblings joined Historical Hotels of America and installed over seventy historical photos and articles throughout the hotel’s public areas. Here is one fun fact: “The first red-light district, where my great-grandfather, Michele DeGeorge, built The Auditorium Hotel, was formerly called ‘The Hollow,’” owner Miki Lusk Norton explained. In the 1800s, The Hollow was bounded by Milam, Louisiana, Capitol,

and Prairie and was home to many female boarding houses on the current sites of The Lancaster Hotel, Alley Theatre, Jones Hall, 515-517 Louisiana and 717 Texas Avenue. The 1900 census takers listed most of the female tenants’ occupation as “prostitute.” The siblings also created a self-



guided tour brochure complete with historical photos and facts. A complimentary brochure or six historical postcards are available in the hotel, the Visitor Center in City Hall, and in independent neighborhood bookstores. For more information, contact Susan Tourtellot (tourtell@sbcglobal.net) or Christina Sacco (smith.sacco@gmail.com) at 713-627-8777.

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ENDNOTES

BLUE BELL

- 1 Blue Bell Creameries, *Blue Bell Ice Cream: A Century at the Little Creamery in Brenham, Texas 1907-2007* (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Custom Publisher, 2007), 10.
- 2 Paul Kruse, Dorothy MacInerney, and Bill Weiss, correspondence with authors, January 27, 2012.
- 3 Paul Kruse, correspondence with authors, January 27, 2012.
- 4 Kruse correspondence.
- 5 Kruse correspondence.
- 6 Kruse correspondence.
- 7 Blue Bell Creameries, 77.
- 8 Blue Bell Creameries, 54, 65, 103.
- 9 Blue Bell Creameries, 71, 87, 66.
- 10 Blue Bell Creameries, 90.
- 11 Blue Bell Creameries, 97.
- 12 Blue Bell Creameries, 22.
- 13 Blue Bell Creameries, 107.
- 14 Kruse correspondence.
- 15 Blue Bell Creameries, 131.
- 16 Blue Bell Creameries, 71.
- 17 Blue Bell Creameries, 132, 71.
- 18 Blue Bell Creameries, 121.
- 19 Kruse, MacInerney, and Weiss correspondence; Blue Bell Creameries, 83.
- 20 Kruse correspondence.
- 21 Blue Bell Creameries, 113.
- 22 Kruse, MacInerney, and Weiss correspondence.
- 23 Kruse, MacInerney, and Weiss correspondence.
- 24 Kruse, MacInerney, and Weiss correspondence.
- 25 Kruse, MacInerney, and Weiss correspondence.
- 26 Blue Bell Creameries, 122.
- 27 Kruse correspondence.

SONNY LOOK

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all material from Carole Look interview with author, January 12, 2012. UH-Oral History of Houston, Houston History Archives, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston.
- 2 Greg Ortale, Wayne Chappell, and Sara McPhillips, interview with author, December 12, 2011.
- 3 Gary Look, personal correspondence with author, January 20, 2012.
- 4 The Palm restaurant took over the location in 1977.
- 5 Ortale, Chappell, and McPhillips, interview.
- 6 Carol Rust, "Venerable Steak House Closes/On last day at Look's, praise for job well-done," *Houston Chronicle*, Star Edition, 1.
- 7 Ortale, Chappell, and McPhillips, interview.
- 8 Ortale, Chappell, and McPhillips, interview; Rust, "Venerable Steakhouse Closes."
- 9 The GHCVC later changed its name to the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- 10 Rust, "Venerable Steak House Closes."
- 11 Ortale, Chappell, and McPhillips, interview.
- 12 Elizabeth Look Biar, personal correspondence with author, January 16, 2012.
- 13 Gary Look, personal correspondence.
- 14 Ortale, Chappell, and McPhillips, interview; Elizabeth Look Biar, personal correspondence.
- 15 Gary Look, personal correspondence.
- 16 Tony Vasquez and Ronal Perez, conversation with author, February 1, 2012.

IRMA'S

- 1 Irma Galvan, interview with Megan Schneider, Houston Oral History Project, Mayor Bill White Collection, Houston Public Library, April 23, 2008 <http://digital.houstonlibrary.org/oral-history/ig-galvan.php>; Irma Galvan, interview with Sandra Davidson, Center for Public History, Gulf Coast Foodways: History, Culture, and Economy, UH-Oral History of Houston Project, Special Collections, M. D. Anderson Library, October 3, 2010.

ANNETTE FINNIGAN

- 1 Although no document with a birthdate has been located and the date has sometimes been stated as 1873, the 1880 Harris County, Texas, Census Records and Annette Finnigan's grave marker at Glenwood Cemetery in Houston would indicate that 1871 is more likely.

- 2 *Houston Daily Post*, January 8, 1909; undated clipping, Houston Packing Company Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library (cited hereinafter as HMRC, HPL); *Houston Post*, July 18, 1940; Interview with Gertrude Maurin, Houston, Texas, December 12, 1988.
- 3 *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Houston 1889-90* (Galveston: Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., 1889), 73; *Annual Report of the Public Schools of the City of Houston, 1889-90* (Houston: A. C. Gray Printer, 1889), 29-30; Letter to author from Jean Berry, Margaret Clapp Library Archives, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, November 23, 1988; Berry to author, December 14, 1988; Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 104-05.
- 4 Elaine Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions: An Informal History of the Seven Sisters Colleges* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1975), 126; Annette Finnigan, "Copy of Letter to Texas Woman," December 16, 1918, Jane Y. McCallum Papers, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library; Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, ed., *History of Woman Suffrage Vol. 4* (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 714.
- 5 Annette Finnigan to Frank Maurin, undated, Finnigan Small Collection, HMRC, HPL; Southwest Center for Urban Research and Rice University School of Architecture, *Houston Architectural Survey Vol. 1* (Houston: Rice University, 1980), 247; Emma Richardson Cherry Papers, The Heritage Society Archives, Houston.
- 6 *Houston Chronicle*, March 14, 1903; Annette Finnigan, "History of Woman Suffrage," undated clipping, Elizabeth Ring Scrapbook, HMRC, HPL.
- 7 Will of John Finnigan, November 6, 1908, Probate Records, Harris County, Texas. Varying reports were found regarding the size of John Finnigan's estate, but an undated *Houston Daily Post* clipping in the Houston Packing Company Collection revealed a value of \$635,276.28; *The Industrial Advantages of Houston, Texas and Environs* (Houston: Akehurst Publishing Co., 1894), 73; *Houston Daily Post*, January 8, 1909; *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Houston, 1907* (Houston: Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., 1907), 85; *Houston Chronicle*, February 25, 1938; Mrs. Henry Fall, ed., *Key to the City of Houston* (Houston: State Publishing Co., 1908), 201.
- 8 National American Woman Suffrage Association, *Handbook and Proceedings of the Annual Convention, 1914*, 179, McCallum Papers. The McCallum papers contain the 1914-15 correspondence between Finnigan and the legislative candidates, as well as Finnigan's Senate Roll Call card on which she made notes of her observations; undated clipping, *Houston Chronicle*, Julia Ideson Collection, HMRC, HPL; Minnie Fisher Cunningham to Annette Finnigan, April 16, 1916, McCallum Papers; Maurin interview.
- 9 Donnelley Erdman, *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston 1925-1975* (Houston: School of Architecture, Rice University n.d.), 3-4; Recording by James Chillman, March 6, 1938, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Archives; interview with Charles Carroll, Registrar, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, November 11, 1988; Collections Records, Registrar's Office; *Houston Post*, April 11, 1937; *Houston Press*, April 5, 1940.
- 10 *Houston Post*, January 15, 1937; *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: A Guide to the Collection* (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1981), 8, 10-11; *Houston Press*, January 15, 1937; <http://www.mfah.org/art/100-highlights/myrtle-wreath>; Chillman recording.
- 11 *Houston Chronicle*, April 12, 1937; *Houston Post*, January 27, 1935; *Houston Press*, April 12, 1937; *Houston Post*, April 11, 1937; *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 1937.
- 12 "City's Culture is Richer, Thanks to Miss Finnigan," *Houston Chronicle*, undated, Annette Finnigan Vertical File, HMRC, HPL; Finnigan to Maurin; "The Finnigan Collection of Illuminated Manuscripts," typescript, Annette Finnigan Vertical File.
- 13 "The Finnigan Collection," typescript, Annette Finnigan Vertical File; Samuel F. Reeves, "Finnigan Collection at Library Dates to 1100," *Houston Chronicle*, May 6, 1951.
- 14 *Houston Chronicle*, October 9, 1939; Annette Finnigan to Martha Schnitzer, November 2, 1939, Finnigan Small Collection, HMRC, HPL.
- 15 *Houston Post*, July 19, 1940; Will of Annette Finnigan, November 29, 1939, Probate Records, Harris County, Texas; Houston Public Library Board Minutes, January 2, 1942, Vol. 8, 1941-43; Interview with Doris Glasser, Houston Public Library, January 19, 1989; Resolutions Passed by the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts of Houston upon the Death of Miss Annette Finnigan, July 17, 1940, MFAH Archives.

FUNERAL MUSEUM

- 1 "History," The National Museum of Funeral History, www.nmfh.org.

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