

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR – FIFTIETH MILESTONES



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We all have milestone moments that mark our personal history – perhaps a wedding, the birth of a child, a career achievement, or, sadly, the loss of a loved one. We also recall historic events that impact our culture. Thinking back to the 1960s, I remember my dad

taking me to see The Beatles at the Houston Coliseum, and my first Major League Baseball games at Colt Stadium and the Astrodome, which cemented my life-long love for the Astros. In the late 1960s when the Intercontinental Airport was under construction, my dad took me there on Sundays to teach me how to drive on the deserted runways, which shows how little we worried about security in those days. Our family went to Astroworld when it opened, and we looked forward with anticipation to the fancy new Galleria and its indoor ice skating rink. Not all milestones were positive however. For example, when my high school finally “integrated,” we added just one black student and one black teacher.

The initial articles in this issue mark milestones from 1969. The first two explore the efforts of University of Houston (UH) students who formed Afro-Americans Students for Black Liberation (AABL) to address racial inequalities on campus that mirrored the larger society. Although UH admitted its first African American student in 1962, progress toward education equality moved slowly. Thus, AABL demanded greater representation in the student body, faculty, and staff and creation of an African American Studies (AAS) program. UH President Phillip Hoffman agreed to create AAS, making it one of the first such programs in the nation and the first diversity studies concentrations at UH. The current director, James L. Conyers, writes about the program’s first fifty years and its importance to the students, the university, and the Houston community.

Those of us old enough to remember the first moon landing likely know right where we were, listening to the radio or watching TV, when the *Eagle* landed on the moon on Sunday, July 20, 1969, at 3:17 p.m. CDT, and, several hours later, when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface. Once Houston was chosen for the Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC), Houstonians bought into the space program with everything they had. NASA rented several buildings around town as they built the MSC, and residents welcomed the astronauts as A-list celebrities. Houston embraced its new identity as “Space City” and continues to celebrate its role past, present, and future in space travel.

Other scientific breakthroughs occurred at the Texas Medical Center. In 1969 Dr. Denton Cooley opened the door to new possibilities in medicine when he implanted the first artificial heart in a patient, who was awaiting a heart transplant. For many years, Cooley and Dr. Michael DeBakey went on to advance techniques in cardiovascular surgery.

Many of our personal milestones may be associated with a historic hotel or restaurant, like the Shamrock Hilton or Sonny Look’s Sir Loin Inn. In 1947 UH began hosting

the Texas Hotel Short Course, but it became apparent as Houston grew that more was needed to train new hospitality professionals. The Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management developed from that need and now educates students from Houston and around the world, providing hotel, culinary, beverage, and management training. Over time, Houston has gained a reputation as a food city and now boasts over 80,000 hotel rooms, which makes UH a natural location for the Hilton College.

The articles that make up the Departments, likewise celebrate a variety of milestones. The Houston Furniture Bank, founded twenty-six years ago by Oli Mohammad, provides a critical service to the community, making furniture affordable to those in need. The photo essay on the hundred-year-old San Isidro Cemetery demonstrates the dramatic impact such a place can have on those seeking to understand its past and the lives of those at rest there. Lastly the anniversary of the Mahatma Gandhi statue installation in Hermann Park and the sesquicentennial of his birth remind us of the leader’s impact on peace and civil rights movements around the world.

We have so many milestones in Houston history that it is impossible to list them all. As you reflect on the special moments in your life, perhaps you will connect to some of these or recall a few Houston milestones of your own. We invite you to share them with us at Facebook/HoustonHistoryMagazine.



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