HOUSTON history
PUBLISHED BY WELCOME WILSON HOUSTON HISTORY COLLABORATIVE
VOLUME 23 • NUMBER 1 • FALL 2025

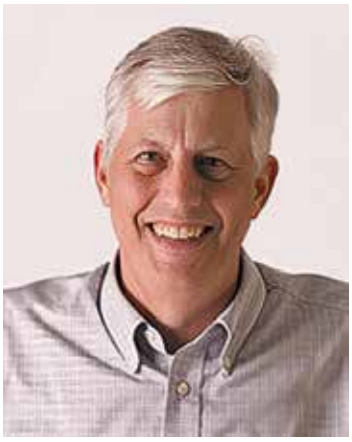
# Houston, Where the Local is Global

Center for Public History
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

# A Celebration of Joe Pratt and His Gifts to Others

*By Debbie Harwell*

It is with great sadness we share the news that our founder and friend Joe Pratt passed away on Saturday, September 20, 2025. Beloved by family, friends, colleagues, and students, Joe brought joy to all who knew him. He always said people only have twenty stories and just repeat different versions of them. But Joe had many more stories, shared in his letters from the editor, revealing his wit and care for others.



*Joseph A. Pratt, NEH Cullen Chair in History and Business.*

Born October 6, 1948, Joe and his siblings grew up in Port Neches. His father, Woodrow Wilson Pratt worked at a chemical plant. Joe called men like his father who came from rural poverty "risk-takers," betting their lives they could "expand their options." Joe's dad taught his children the values of hard work and helping the community. "My dad raised me to pitch for the St. Louis Cardinals," Joe mused. Baseball taught him geography and math and offered "a window into the world."

Joe had twenty-eight aunts and uncles and about forty cousins. His mother, Ruth, took the children to gospel music "singings" and worked at a burger place, which had a side window for Black customers. Joe reflected, "Although some in our town did not preach or practice racism, few if any voiced opposition." Like many in his generation, Joe became aware of racial injustice through sports, music, movies, books, and news coverage of civil rights.

Joe attended Rice University, but, he quipped, he first studied the oil industry during his "summers working in the labor gangs of oil and petrochemical plants … I cleaned out tanks … and scraped out carbon black residue for the large dryers used to make synthetic rubber." He also worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week, laying pipeline in East Texas. He wrote his senior thesis on his dad's union, the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, and later became a preeminent oil and business historian.

Joe married his wife Suzy in 1969. The next year, just before Joe headed off to basic training, they visited Bolivar Peninsula, which Joe called "my first beach." He gleefully shared the story of visiting a friend's pink beach cabin. When they arrived the key fit but did not open the lock, so Joe climbed through a window and opened the door. Later he discovered they had missed a turn and were guilty of "breaking and entering" at the only other pink cabin.

Joe taught at UC Berkley, Harvard Business School, and Texas A&M before coming to the University of Houston. The recipient of multiple teaching awards, he taught graduate seminars and the large US History survey with equal ease, telling stories to grab the students' attention. In his last letter from the editor before retiring, Joe told of ringing Grandma Pratt's dinner bell – renamed "the history bell" – to tell his students "it was time to come to order to learn some history."

Memories of Joe flow effusively from former students and colleagues. Dr. William Kellar, a former student and colleague, recalled Joe's passion for student success, noting Joe's installation of a mirror in the Scholars Community with a sign above it saying "Success starts here." Kellar reminisced, "Every student who passed through our offices looked into that mirror … and realiz[ed] that their success in life started with them." Bernadette Pruitt credited Joe for her PhD (the first awarded in history to a Black woman at UH), saying, "[H]e had a vision for the University of Houston, one that involved seeing and embracing students of color, from working-class backgrounds … as meaningful, extraordinary members of society."

Joe approached teaching with humility, writing after he presided over graduation as interim dean, that he stood there as "a plant worker's son masquerading as a university professor in academic robes instead of a hard hat." But he was no imposter.

When Joe came to UH in 1986, he was reunited with his friend Marty Melosi who had started the Institute (now Center) for Public History (CPH). Melosi recalled, "When Joe joined the faculty at UH, I was energized. We spent the next several years scheming and planning on numerous CPH projects. This was a joy."

In 2003, CPH, under Joe's direction, began publishing what is now *Houston History*. He worked with community historians like Steven Fenberg who said, "Joe Pratt was my advocate and guide." Students were an integral part of producing the magazine. Joe explained, "We created a pleasant place where 'work' often seemed like play." And I can assure you, it did; we worked hard and laughed hard. Hopefully we still capture that fun that marks Joe's legacy. At CPH's thirtieth anniversary, Joe wrote, "Together with many others, [Marty and I] have built a sturdy outpost of history in a region long neglectful of its past."

This tribute to Joe merely scratches the surface, and we plan a full retrospective in a future issue. For now, we offer our deepest sympathy to Suzy, Kate, Ryan, Felix, and Theo. We mourn the loss of our friend, celebrate a life well-lived, and give thanks we were lucky enough to be in Joe's orbit.

HOUSTON history
PUBLISHED BY WELCOME WILSON HOUSTON HISTORY COLLABORATIVE
VOLUME 23 • NUMBER 1 • FALL 2025

# Houston, Where the Local is Global



**EDITORIAL POLICY**

***Houston History*** is published twice a year by the Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative in the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. We welcome manuscripts, interviews, photographic essays, and ideas for topical issues on the history and culture of the Houston region, broadly defined. Please send correspondence to *Houston History*, University of Houston, Center for Public History, 3455 Cullen Blvd., Room 521, Houston, TX 77204-3007 or email **HoustonHistory@uh.edu**, phone 713.743.3123.



**Cover artwork** is by Heather Butina-Sutton, who will complete her Ph.D. in history at the University of Houston in Spring 2026.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## FEATURES



## COMMUNITIES



## 100 YEARS OF STORIES

*Members of the Houston Saengerbund host Oktoberfest at their new headquarters, located in the Houston Heights, in 2023. They spent time throughout their season practicing for the event, which celebrates their German heritage.* Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund.

# The Houston Saengerbund: "One of the Best Kept Secrets in the City of Houston"

*By Jonas Leon Kaupert*

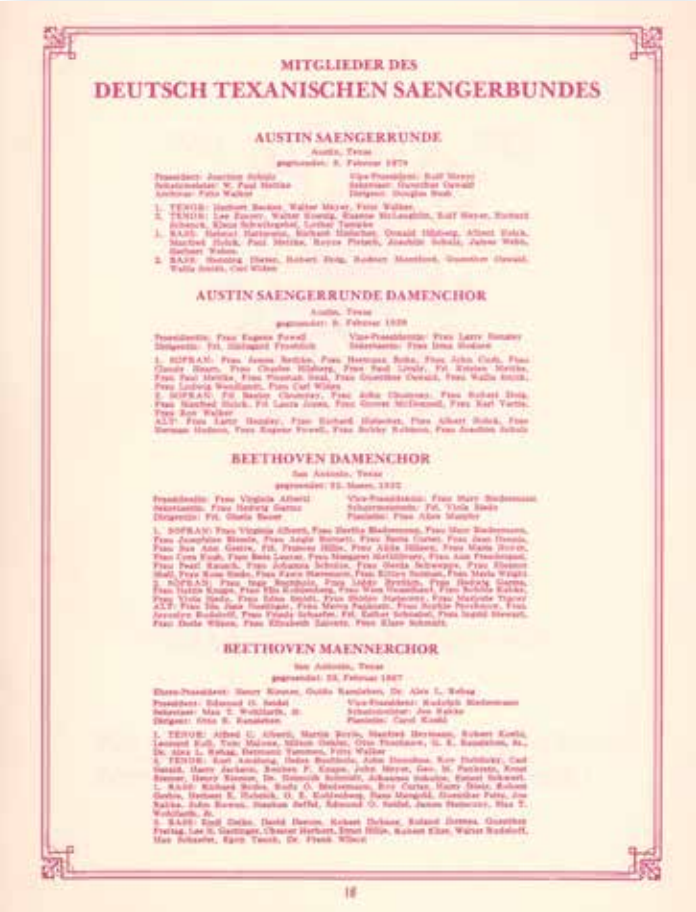
Houston ranks as one of the most diverse cities in the United States, but few know about one of its best-kept secrets: the Houston Saengerbund, a German Texan singing society. The city's oldest musical society, the Saengerbund is also a community who celebrates singing German songs and honoring German Texan culture.[1] Area residents may be familiar with some imprints of German culture in the city, such as its German street names, Tomball's world-renowned Christmas Market, or Oktoberfest. However, few people know about the Houston Saengerbund or how it found its way to Houston.

## Early Years

German migration to Texas grew steadily in the early nineteenth century, driven by the push for free trade and industrialization that swept Europe following the Napoleonic Wars. As industrialization rose and replaced the guild systems that had protected the artisan and handcraft industries, an economic crisis emerged. Agricultural land in Germany became scarce compared to its high population density, causing some families to leave their homeland and take a chance in Texas, where land was cheap and available in large quantities. The German settlements that emerged not only enriched the state's labor force and agricultural industry but also brought cultural institutions like German-language newspapers, gymnastic clubs, marksmanship clubs, and singing societies to the broader community.[2]

From 1850 to the early twentieth century, nearly a hundred German singing societies emerged throughout Texas. While some singing societies have died out as their villages disappeared, active singing societies still operate in Austin, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, New Braunfels, and Fredericksburg.[3] One of Texas's oldest German singing societies is *Der Deutsch-Texanische Sängerbund* (the German Texan Singers' League), or DTSB. In operation since 1853, DTSB serves as an umbrella association of German Texan singing societies and organizes festivities like the *Sängerfest*, a competition between singing groups and a community festival.

Founded on October 6, 1883, the Houston Saengerbund celebrates its 142nd anniversary in 2025, making it Houston's oldest musical society. While there are no



MITGLIEDER DES

DEUTSCH TEXANISCHEN SAENGERBUNDES

AUSTIN SAENGERRUNDE

AUSTIN SAENGERRUNDE DAMENCHOR

BEETHOVEN DAMENCHOR

BEETHOVEN MAENNERCHOR

*As German immigration increased in Texas, many German institutions like the Houston Saengerbund emerged. This program listed singing societies from Texas towns which met at the Saengerfest to sing.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund Records, box 1, folder 11, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

surviving records for the organization's first twenty years, documents from the early twentieth century indicate the first formal meeting occurred on June 1, 1884, with twenty-four singers and fifty non-singers listed as members. That same year, the Houston Saengerbund members formalized the singing society by electing their club officers.[4]

## 1913 Maennerchor

During its early years, the Saengerbund hosted the DTSB in Houston in 1885, 1894, 1902, and 1913. Moritz Tiling, author of the *German Element in Texas*, described the 1885 Sängerfest, saying: "When the opening day of the Sängerfest arrived everything was spick and span. The city was gaily decorated along all the principal streets, Main and Preston, Congress and Travis Streets, however, wearing the most gorgeous apparel. The public spirited merchants along these thoroughfares seemed determined to outdo each other in promoting the spirit of the occasion, and had draped their house fronts in the gayest attire."[5]

The following years marked an influx of members, as many German immigrants who came to Houston in the early twentieth century were naturally attracted to participating in German cultural traditions in their new home. Membership continued to grow, and by 1908, the Saengerbund had 176 active members, which ballooned to 407 members by 1913. The club activities during this period not only included singing German folk songs but also staging dramatic plays, participating in gymnastic activities, and giving lectures to German American audiences about the positive impact of German culture on the United States.[6]

In 1920, the Saengerbund honored its beloved choir director, C. C. Lieb, for his twenty-fifth anniversary with the organization. Having served as director since 1895, he became one of the longest-serving choir directors in the history of the Houston Saengerbund. Members showed their gratitude by gifting him a hand-painted anniversary picture signed by notable and active members of the choir, including former Saengerbund president Hellberg, who held the post for about twelve years, and former president Victor Juenger.[7]

Lieb's active role in the DTSB's Sängerfest is often cited as the reason the choir still exists today. One of his notable events was the choir's participation in the 1913 Sängerfest held in Houston. The festivities lasted for three days and included morning and afternoon concerts. Approximately 300 children sang in the *Kinderchor* (children's choir), and the Saengerbund organized parades and picnics for its members. Lieb's dedication to the DTSB and the Saengerbund established continuity for the choir, which he served until his death in 1927.

In 1938, the Houston Saengerbund established the *Damenchor* (women's choir), as prior to that date women had been excluded from singing in the Houston Saengerbund. Although choir men and women worked together harmoniously, one female club member described the gender dynamics of the club as more separated. "We have our meetings and they have theirs," she said with some amusement. "The men, they talk for hours and hours; they argue about things. The ladies, we get our meeting done with and we're out. We are waiting for coffee and cake. We always have coffee and cake!"[8]

*Founded in 1883, the Saengerbund is one of Houston's oldest music societies. It began with the Maennerchor (men's choir), shown here in 1913.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund Records, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.


*In 1920, the Saengerbund commemorated their beloved choir director, C. C. Lieb, for his twenty-five years of service. He served as director from 1895 until his death in 1927.* Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund Records, box 1, folder 2, University of Houston Libraries.

## World War II Era

Current Saengerbund president Rodney Thorin notes that C. C. Lieb paved the way for the organization's future through the World War II era, when anti-German sentiment made it difficult to celebrate German culture in the United States. As U.S. soldiers fought overseas, having German words on a building's exterior was less than ideal, to say the least. A few acts of hostility occurred at the Saengerbund, including incidents of rocks being "thrown at the building and some of the windows [being] broken." One member later commented that "it was mostly kids' stuff. They knew that those words up there on our sign, 'Houston Sängerbund', were German."[9]

The Houston Saengerbund experienced multiple changes due to the war. First, the Saengerbund stopped conducting its meetings in German and switched to English. A decline in the number of German immigrants meant that the Saengerbund lost members and that second and third-generation German Americans lost fluency in the language. While the Saengerbund's members initially recorded the meeting minutes in both German and English, by 1942, they were in English only.[10]

Another change during these difficult years was the loss of the Saengerbund's linguistic definition, including singing in German. In the summer of 1940, the Saengerbund considered changing the club's name to its English equivalent, The Houston Singing Society. Members discussed whether they should ask the local newspapers to explain to their readers what the name "Sängerbund" means or if they should use the English equivalent. Others opposed these plans, arguing that the club had "nothing to be ashamed of," and that changing the name would be disrespectful to the former members. Ultimately, the group decided to change its name to the Houston Singing Society in January 1942, in part as a public relations measure and outward display of patriotism, and in part because some members felt they were "all 100% Americans."[11]

World War II caused the singing society's members to fear that they might never sing again. Members began voicing their concerns, many of which echoed the question, "When will we start singing again?" One member predicted that "attendance [would] fall off more and more" if they did not do something to spark public interest. Suggestions included doing "minstrel show[s]" or a "musical sketch," or that the club should sing both English and German songs, once again shifting focus to language and public perceptions of German Americans. Despite the difficulties, the club survived the war years unscathed and began to prosper again. Nevertheless, the club continued to use its English name until 1952 because the membership believed people needed time for healing before reintroducing the public to a more traditional German Saengerbund.[12]

## Post-War Era

By the 1950s, membership had fallen to just 133 singers, well under the club's pre-war numbers. In the mid-1950s, they attracted a wave of post-war German immigrants and resumed hosting events like showing German-language films. Other notable events from the decade included participating in the DTSB's 100th *Sängertag* (singing day) in New Braunfels in 1953, and a celebration on the club's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1958, which included a "Friday evening dinner, a Saturday night dance, and [its] Sunday singing program."[13]

Club activities picked up again in the 1960s and 1970s, as the Houston group travelled to their companion singing societies in San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas for the annual Sängertage. In August 1963, Gunther Pfingsten founded the Sängerbund Soccer Club as an avenue for bringing in younger members and fostering community engagement. When Pfingsten came to Houston in the mid-1950s, he found himself isolated. "I lived for a year in a boarding house," he said in an interview, "and did not meet any Germans." After saving to purchase a car, he "went to Memorial Park and… saw a few people playing soccer. I had to go over there!" The players turned out to be German members of the Saengerbund, who invited Pfingsten to join the club. "And that's how I began to sing." Ably assisted by Horst Gerbert, a fifty-plus-year member of the Saengerbund Kickers and the current team coach, Pfingsten's enthusiastic leadership led to two team championships. Although the Sängerbund Soccer Club never became a "focal point for German players," it is still active today.[14]

As the 1960s drew to a close, the Saengerbund began to have real estate challenges due to decreasing membership. To recoup the loss of revenue, they leased some of their grounds on Feagan Street to *Der Bier Garten, Inc*., which ran the popular beer garden, Bavarian Gardens. In a club history, Theodore Gish wrote, "under the terms of the lease,

*In addition to singing, the Saengerbund has group activities for its members, including the Saengerbund Kickers, a soccer team that participates in local tournaments and won a championship in 2005. Coach Horst Gebert stands at left.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund.

the Sängerbund [had] access to its property and building on specific occasions," which included "its anniversary celebration [each fall]." This arrangement alleviated some of the club's hardships for the next decade until a fire damaged the old Saengerbund hall on September 5, 1980. Several hundred patrons at Bavarian Gardens had to be evacuated, thankfully without injury. Unfortunately for the Saengerbund, the fire caused considerable damage to the roof, interior, and furnishings, leading to costly repairs. Additionally, the decade was marked by a decrease of German migrants to Houston, which understandably influenced the Saengerbund's membership.[15]

## Changing Times

In 1983, there was much to celebrate. President Reagan declared October 6th "German-American Day" in commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the establishment of Germantown near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1683. The year also marked the centennial of Houston Saengerbund's founding in 1883. Celebrations of the tricentennial took place in Texas, in other cities throughout the United States, and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). As part of the observations, the Houston Saengerbund "sang on several public occasions…which were coordinated by the German Consulate-General's office and the Houston regional office of the Institute of International Education." For its own celebration, the club threw a party that included "an excellent portable photographic and text exhibit on the history of the Sängerbund."[16]

The decades after the centennial have been a period of change. Most notably, the organization now has four choirs. Along with the original Maennerchor and Damenchor, which the group added in 1937, the Saengerbund also includes a *Gemischter Chor* (mixed-voice choir), formed in 1987, and the recently reestablished *Kinder Chor* (children's choir). The performance season, which runs from August through the following May, generally includes one or more Oktoberfest performances in September and October, a *Weihnachtskonzert* (Christmas concert) in December, a *Frühlingskonzert* (Spring concert) around Easter, and participation in the annual *Deutsch-Texanischer Sängerfest* (German Texan singing fest) each May. In addition, the choirs are often invited to perform at festivals and events in the Houston area.[17]

Another significant change for that organization has been a change in location. Despite the damage to the Feagan Street property in 1980, the club did not sell it until 2004. After the sale, the Saengerbund continued to meet at the historic First Lutheran Church (FLC) in Midtown, the oldest German-Protestant congregation in Houston. In 2022, the club acquired its permanent home at the former Heights Christian Church, located at 1703 Heights Boulevard. Now called the Houston Saengerbund Saengerhalle, the building has ample rehearsal and performance space and has been rented out to other organizations for events such as opera performances, chorale collaborations, and holiday celebrations like the Juneteenth Celebration Concert.[18]

## Gemütlichkeit

As a German University of Houston exchange student in 2021, I had the chance to speak with Rodney Thorin, the president of the Houston Saengerbund, who received me warmly and asked if I would like a *Köstritzer*, a German beer made in Bad Köstritz close to my hometown in Germany. When I had the pleasure of visiting, the Saengerbund was still located at the *Sängerbund Haus* (singing society's house) at

*As a sign of the changing times in society, the women's choir merged into full membership, yielding a Gemischter Chor (mixed choir), in 1987. Today, anyone with a love for singing can join one of the many choirs the Houston Saengerbund has to offer.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund.

3410 Austin Street, which was decorated in an authentically German style. I felt like I was at home the moment I stepped through the door. The house served as a gathering place for its members, such as after a rehearsal or when they want to watch an Astros game. It includes a library with donated German books, a comfortable living room, and accommodations for the costumes, uniforms, performance equipment, and the jerseys of the Saengerbund soccer kickers.

Rodney Thorin was born in Montana but moved multiple times due to his father's Navy career, before settling in Houston in 1999. He found the Houston Saengerbund through a Facebook ad for its annual *Frühlingskonzert* in 2016 and became a regular member a few months later. Thorin, who is of German background and has visited the country, loves the country's language and traditions. Thus, he wants to continue fostering Houstonians' love of German culture through the Saengerbund.

Thorin emphasized that the Saengerbund is not only about German culture, it is about German Texan culture, too. He explains, "We are not a choir that is in Germany. It is different. We still have to appeal to American taste. It is a mix of both." Part of the group's growing diversity can be seen in the languages used in its performances. "Not all of our concerts are in German," Thorin continued. "The *Weihnachtskonzert* will be mostly in German, but we will also have other songs. We have a little bit of everything. One song is in French, other songs will be in English. A couple of years ago we had two choir members from Puerto Rico, so we had a Spanish song, too."[19]

Balancing the diversity of the membership while maintaining its German roots is something the group is mindful of, and has done successfully. In rehearsals, the Saengerbund tries to use as many German phrases as possible, as well as when they are at the Saengerbund Haus. The organization includes a Language and Culture Committee that coordinates regular German language meetups.[20] Although some members are fluent in German, others do not speak German at all but still enjoy singing in the Saengerbund, as German is a phonetic language.


*The Saengerhalle, located at 1703 Heights Boulevard, is home to wonderful events such as the group's Frühlingskonzert (Spring concert), Oktoberfest, and Weihnachtskonzert (Christmas concert).* Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund.

*The Houston Saengerbund Kinder Choir performs at the 2023 Staatssängerfest concert.* Photo courtesy of the Houston Saengerbund.

When comparing the Houston Saengerbund to other German Texan singing societies, Thorin believes "[the Houston Saengerbund has] to work harder at maintaining the historical tie and we are doing it through what we do, not where we are. It is truly about the music and the concerts."[21] He contrasts the Houston group with singing societies like the *Beethoven Männerchor*, which has its own restaurant in San Antonio's historic district, in addition to its performances.

For the future, Thorin wishes to create a German cultural center in Houston, as there is for French, Italian, or Czech culture. He would like the Saengerbund to take a leading role in its creation with other local German organizations, like the Texas-German Heritage Society, the Houston-Leipzig Sister City Association, the Deutsche Samstagsschule Houston, The German Institute for the Southwest, and the German Consulate Houston. Although many Germans live in Houston, and German immigrants shaped the city, it has no focal point for German culture.[22]

As a German exchange student, I enjoyed learning about the Houston Saengerbund, which I had never heard of before. Getting to know German culture in a different country was fascinating to me, as I had never expected to learn about German Texan culture in Houston. Being in Houston changed my views on the United States and Texas in particular, considering the diversity of the city and its friendly people. Not only did I learn about American culture, but I also had the opportunity to experience a combination of both cultures within the Houston Saengerbund. Keeping up the German Texan culture makes the Houston Saengerbund one of the best kept secrets in Houston, and as a German, I can only say this: Keep up this wonderful tradition! HH

**Jonas Leon Kaupert** was a German exchange student at the University of Houston in the fall of 2021, majoring in English, political science, and education. He returned to his home in Leipzig, Germany, to complete his education and become a teacher.

# The Houston Saengerbund:
## A Legacy of German Culture and Song

*By Vince Lee*

The Houston Saengerbund, meaning "singing society," was founded on October 6, 1883, by German immigrants. They sought to bring their musical traditions from Germany to their new American homes and communities in Texas. From its inception, the organization has served as a cultural anchor, providing a space for Germans and those interested in German heritage to connect, share their love of music, and maintain their linguistic and cultural roots.

In Theodore Gish's introduction to his published manuscript on "The History of the Houston Saengerbund," he emphasized the "recreational, social, and spiritual function of choral singing" for the German immigrant and its therapeutic value of making frontier life and toil a little more bearable, providing respite for these early German pioneers who marched westward and settled in Texas.[1]

The Houston Saengerbund Records contains songbooks, events programs, ledgers, letters, treasury reports and other materials documenting the activities and administration of the organization from 1874 to 2013. Some of the highlighted materials of interest include a 1952 membership card belonging to a Mr. Freddy Hagenburger when the organization was still known as the Houston Singing Society and located at 3908 Feagan Street in Houston.[2]

Other items of interest include the Bylaws governing the Ladies Auxiliary of the Houston Saengerbund. Founded on April 6, 1937, the auxiliary established and maintained its own *Damenchor* (women's chorus). Membership in the Ladies Auxiliary consisted of affiliation—women whose husbands or sons were members of the Houston Saengerbund and daughters whose fathers were members.[3]

The collection also contains published songbooks from the early 1900s when the Houston Saengerbund performed as part of the annual *Deutsch Texanischer Sängerbund* (DTSB) festival. The festival then rotated among host cities in Texas such as Austin, Houston, and San Antonio.[4]

A challenging period during the Houston Saengerbund's history can be found in a recorded entry in a Records Ledger book dated July 27, 1937. Although written in German, the entry mentions the rise of anti-German sentiment against the organization due to the Nazi Party. This was a precursor of things to come as the organization took action in changing its name from the Houston Saengerbund to the Houston Singing Society during World War II to mitigate anti-German discrimination at this time.[5]

Throughout its long history, the Houston Saengerbund has performed countless concerts, participated in civic events, and fostered a strong sense of camaraderie among its members. Their repertoire spans traditional German folk songs, classical pieces, and patriotic anthems, all performed with a passion that reflects their dedication to the art form. Beyond the musical performances, the Saengerbund also hosts social gatherings, German language classes, and cultural events that further enrich the Houston community.

Today, nearly 142 years since its founding, the Houston Saengerbund continues its mission, welcoming new members who share their enthusiasm for German culture and choral music. It remains a cherished institution, bridging generations and ensuring that the rich heritage of German song thrives in Houston for years to come.



***Above:*** *Songbook for Houston Saengerbund Bass performers at Des Deutsch Texanischen Saengerbundes (the German Texan Singers' League), 1902.*

***Below:*** *A membership card belonging to Mr. Freddy Hagenburger, 1952, reflects the organization's name change made during World War II.*

All photos courtesy of Houston Saengerbund Records, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

**Special Collections** in the M.D. Anderson Library is open Monday-Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For more information on how to view the Houston Saengerbund Records or visit the archives, go to **https://libraries.uh.edu/special-collections/**.

**Vince Lee** is the archivist for the Houston and Texas History Research Collection, University of Houston Libraries.


# Relocation, not Dislocation:

*By Daniel Killian*

Today, when Houstonians refer to Chinatown, they most likely mean the area known as Bellaire–an expanse covering over six square miles of shops, structures, and shoppers that celebrate various cultures, from Chinese to Vietnamese, Indian, and beyond. Indeed, the area is better termed Asia Town. Bellaire is just one of four Chinatowns that have emerged during Houston's history, including two other locations in downtown, prior to passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which opened Asian immigration to the United States.[1]

The first Houston Chinatown was located at Smith Street and Texas Avenue, near the present-day Alley Theatre. This Chinatown developed in the 1930s, as the Great Depression forced Chinese Americans to migrate across the United States in search of work. Prior to that time, the few Chinese who lived in Houston likely descended from laborers coming to work on the Houston and Texas Central Railway in 1870. A contract with Chew Ah Heang in San Francisco brought 250 laborers from California to extend the railroad from Calvert to Dallas. However, after six months, they quit and sued the railroad for wage-related contract violations. Despite their contracts stipulating a return journey, many went on to become sharecroppers in Texas.[2]

***Photo above:*** *The On Leong Merchants Association formed in 1893 as a national mutual aid society for Chinese men. The Houston chapter filed with the Texas Secretary of State in 1944, although it existed prior to that time.* Photo courtesy of the Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library, MSS-1248-0404.

What happened to most of these early Chinese residents, any children they may have had, or Houston's earliest Chinatown is a mystery. Little research has been conducted on this community and signs point to little archival documentation given their marginalized status. What is known is that the Smith Street enclave was largely organized around three institutions: the Kuomintang radio station, the On Leong Merchants Association, and the Chinese Baptist Church. Affiliated with China's nationalist party (Kuomintang), the radio station was managed by the Republic of China's Houston consulate and


*Located in Old Chinatown on Chartres Street, behind the George R. Brown Convention Center, Yen Huong Bakery has operated since 1982, supplying Vietnamese mooncakes and other baked goods to Bellaire's Chinatown.* Photo courtesy of Antonio Lopez.


# Organizational Continuity across Houston's Chinatowns

did not survive the war between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang (KMT) in 1949.[3]

Beginning in 1951, the original enclave moved to what is now considered East Downtown, in response to gentrification in the area and relocation of the On Leong Merchants Association to a space the Chinese community purchased at 801 Chartres Street. The Chinese Baptist Church was already across the street on Lamar, thus, businesses and organizations followed, most notably the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. This Chinatown—now known as Old Chinatown—enjoyed about thirty years of community prominence before entering decades of decline and disappearance from its standing in downtown, the Chinese community, and public memory.[4]

Several events caused Old Chinatown's decline. First, in 1981, the city built the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB) directly across Chartres Street and the Eastex Freeway (I-69) from it. The freeway runs on an elevated section beside and parallel to Chartres. While the GRB's construction was initially celebrated as an opportunity to attract businesses to Old Chinatown, once finished, rising land prices put property acquisition firmly out of reach for the enclave's community members. This, along with aging sewer lines, halted development in the area. Additionally, the GRB's expansion in 2001 blocked off the main McKinney Street entrance to Old Chinatown, isolating it from downtown. The area's recent rebranding as East Downtown (EaDo) opened it up to gentrification, but the final blow came from the North Houston Highway (I-45) Improvement Project that will soon demolish the few remaining Old Chinatown structures for the freeway's expansion.[5]

Concomitantly, the founding of a new Chinatown on Bellaire Boulevard near Beltway 8 attracted visitors and businesses away from Old Chinatown. Although the area is known simply as "Bellaire," it is not part of the City of Bellaire that straddles Loop 610 West. The Bellaire Chinatown seems better suited to the needs of the increasingly suburban population of Chinese Houstonians today, especially given its proximity to Alief, which boasts the largest Asian population in Houston. Plans for the "new Chinatown" west of Fondren Road began in the mid-eighties. Desegregation in the late twentieth


*Like the Chinese enclaves, Houston's Little Saigons have been primarily business rather than residential districts. In its heyday, Vietnamese street signs, like this one at Milam and Stuart, marked the original Little Saigon.*

Photo courtesy of WhisperToMe and Wikimedia Commons.


*The first group of officers for CACA included Edward K.T. Chen, center, and Albert Gee, second to the left of the podium, in November 1954. In addition to being CACA president, Gee served as president of the Houston Restaurant Association, which he cofounded.*

Photo courtesy of Edward C. M. Chen.

century, combined with what immigration attorney Gordan Quan characterized as a "maturing," wealthier community, increasingly enabled Chinese Americans to purchase homes in the suburbs.[6]

The Asian American population in Houston has experienced major growth in recent decades, after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act struck down the quota system that limited entry for non-European immigrants. Vietnamese immigration became prominent following the fall of Saigon, with the original Vietnamese enclave developing along Milam Street in Midtown. In the 1990s as the Vietnamese population grew, rents rose, and gentrification pressed in, Little Saigon moved adjacent to what is now Bellaire Chinatown. Today, Little Saigon continues to be a major component of Bellaire Chinatown's multicultural character. As the area continued to grow, increased demand necessitated opening another Asia Town in Katy in 2017.[7]

Characterizing Old Chinatown's decline, therefore, is a complicated task. While gentrification played a large role in the move, Bellaire became a better fit for today's Chinese community. Perhaps the lack of commemoration for Old Chinatown is the biggest tragedy in its fall. No real efforts have been made to preserve its structures, the last of which will come down as the I-45 expansion goes up. It lacks historical markers, walking tours, or any acknowledgement of the role the area once played in the Chinese community. However, this might change. Gordan Quan has mentioned plans, complete with Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) funding, to install artwork commemorating the role of Chinese family history in the Old Chinatown area.[8]

*The Sun Deluxe Café, a staple of Old Chinatown, was located in the On Leong Merchants Association's building, which also housed a spiritual sanctuary and altar, meeting spaces, and a ballroom.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston Chinatown Photographs Collection, box 1, folder 2, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

By some measures, little was lost in moving to the new Chinatown. Few people lived in Old Chinatown; thus, few families were displaced. But businesses suffered major losses. Some, like Kim Son restaurant, may relocate the original location, although they already have another location in Bellaire. Flagship organizations like the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, various family associations, and the Chinese Baptist Church are thriving. Only the On Leong Merchants Association has closed.[9]

Albert Gee, with other prominent community members Edward K. T. Chen, Hobert Joe, Wallace Gee, and Judge Sam Eng established the Chinese American Citizens Alliance Houston Lodge (CACA) in 1954. Today, the organization remains one of the most influential in the community. Quan described it as an early "spokesperson" for Chinese Americans in Houston. For example, during segregation, Chinese Americans often worked as grocers, owning and running stores in Black and Latino neighborhoods. Quan, whose family had a small grocery store, explained that since many of these grocers had their education interrupted by the Second Sino-Japanese War or World War II, they needed a support system. Thus, CACA organized health department days on Sundays, so that store owners did not have to miss work to obtain their health permits.[10]

CACA also engaged in political activism. After robbers killed multiple grocers in the community, CACA intervened via district attorneys to prevent further violence against store owners. The organization planned a boycott against a local oil company, who refused to hire a Chinese woman based on her race. Represented by Albert Gee, the Houston Lodge supported and helped secure passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Edward K. T. Chen, who served in 1932

*The Houston Lodge's twenty-fifth anniversary party reflected the original youth and women's auxiliary branches. Their membership depended on their husband or father's CACA membership until the auxiliary merged with the main lodge.*

Photo courtesy of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance records (Houston Chapter), MS 606, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University.

as secretary of the Republic of China's Vice Consulate for the southern United States and became Houston's first Chinese American professor, wrote the following about the organization: "With a chapter of the CACA in Houston, we can bring forth the united effort of our people to participate in the local community affairs to prove that we are good American citizens and that we intend to fully assume the responsibilities that go with our citizenship. At the same time, we can take part in any nation-wide effort to protest any discriminatory practices that may be prejudicial to our rights and to protect those rights which are guaranteed to us by the laws and Constitution of the United States."[11]

One of the most prominent and longstanding events sponsored by the organization was the annual Miss Chinatown pageant. Young women involved with CACA vied for a chance to win a scholarship and compete in the Miss Chinatown USA pageant in San Francisco. CACA began to organize these pageants in 1971, and they continue today, with more lucrative prizes. In 1983, the pageant winner received a $500 ($1,600 today) cash scholarship, while the other contestants received a U.S. Savings Bond. In comparison, the 2025 winner received a $6,000 scholarship.[12]

The Gee family represents another important touchstone for Houston's Chinese community members, who often referred to Albert Gee as the "unofficial mayor of Chinatown." A CACA cofounder, he was the Houston Lodge president from 1955 to 1958 and the national grand president from 1971 to 1972. Born in Detroit in 1920, he and his family soon made their way to New Orleans to run a laundry until his father's death in 1927. His mother, unable to speak English, moved her three sons back to China, where Albert stayed until he was eleven. He then returned to the United States with his godfather, working in San Francisco. In 1936, his cousin Harry Gee, Sr., who owned multiple restaurants in Houston, called on Albert to join him. Over the years, Albert transitioned out of his cousin's stores and into his own. These included a grocery store and restaurants such as Hong Kong Chef, the Chinese Oven, Ding How, the Poly-Asian, the Poly-Asian West, and Albert Gee's Cuisine of China.[13]

Albert and his wife Jane Gee, also the child of immigrants, hosted new immigrants to Houston who stayed at the grocery store while adjusting to their new surroundings. Jane served as president of the CACA Women's Auxiliary and later became the first woman to serve as president of CACA in 1983. Their daughter, Linda Wu, remarked that although Albert was president, Jane often helped him write his speeches and thus had an easy transition from working in the background to the forefront.[14]

Another prominent Gee family member, Harry Gee Sr., Albert's cousin, was a founding member of the Gee Family Association, Houston's largest family association, which remains active today. Harry Gee Sr. brought Albert to Houston and, soon after, Albert brought his brothers Gordan and Wallace from China. The three brothers worked in Harry Sr.'s restaurant, China Village. Harry brought his children Harry Jr., Mayling, and Mary May from China and mentored several cousins who worked in his restaurants, including Frank, George, and Henry Seu Heaum Gee who opened Houston's first Chinese language school. Jane Gee, then Jane Eng, worked as a cashier at China Village.[15]

Harry Gee Sr. served a fifteen-year term as president of the On Leong Merchants Association, and funds he raised enabled the organization to move from the original Smith Street location to Chartres Street. After On Leong's move, Harry opened the Sun Deluxe Cafe in the same area, where several of the Gees continued to work.[16]

Family associations played an important role in Houston's Chinese community and across the country. These groups formed around family ties, shared last names, and places of origin such as Taishan, Kaiping, and Enping counties in the case of the Gees. Family associations became prominent because of harsh anti-Chinese and immigration restrictions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the U.S. government overturned the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, immigrants became part of the existing quota system, which granted only 105 visas annually to people from China and required them to have family members already in the United States. These policies and ongoing discrimination forced the Chinese community to rely on family associations for support and survival.[17]

*Albert Gee and his wife, Jane Gee, toast the winner of the Miss Chinatown pageant, which they helped found in 1970. The couple also helped organize the Houston Taipei Sister City Society to promote cultural and commercial ties between the two cities.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD0006-N4307-001.

The Gees and other families helped relatives immigrate through a process known as chain migration. This occurs when established emigrants sponsor their family members immigrating to the United States who then, in turn, sponsor other relatives. This was frequently the only legal avenue for Chinese people to immigrate until 1965. As a result, just a few families made up the Chinese community in cities like Houston. Once here, those families assisted one another, hosting new immigrants in their homes, providing financial support, employing them, and offering a social network to rely on if needed.[18]

Even though the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act facilitated immigration from China, the Gee Family Association of Houston continues its legacy of service. The Gee Family Association Education Fund of Greater Houston, for instance, annually selects scholarship recipients who demonstrate strong community involvement within Houston's Asian community. The number of recipients varies, but awards are typically presented during the annual Chinese New Year's Banquet in amounts ranging from $1,000 to $5,000. Likewise, Harry Gee Jr. has partnered with multiple organizations, from the Houston Public Library to the Gee Family Association and the Chinese Professional Club to provide scholarships, endow funds, and even build schools in Houston and China.[19]

The Chinese Baptist Church became another prominent institution in Old Chinatown that remains a vibrant part of Houston's Chinese American community. First located in the original Chinatown, the church moved to a space set aside for its worshipers by the First Baptist Church of Houston at 1020 Lamar Street. In 1953, the congregation relocated to its own building at 1823 Lamar near the Chartres Street commercial center, before being displaced by the Eastex Freeway and GRB, separating it from the Chinese enclave entirely. As a result, in 1975 the church moved permanently to 900 Brogden Road on the Westside in the Memorial area.[20]

Gordan Quan mentioned that, despite several contributing factors leading to the Chinese Baptist Church's relocation, the move to Brogden Street was a community effort and largely benefitted Chinese Americans in Houston. The downtown location suited the needs of the Asian American community in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was smaller and less affluent. At that point, the "be a busy bee, give a dime a week" campaign, as Quan described it, supported the church with member donations and newspaper drives, raising a limited amount of money. However, he observed that by the 1970s the community had increasingly included professionals. Members donated money for a larger space, with facilities like a gymnasium, and located closer to today's flagship organizations, like the Chinese Community Center. Activities sponsored by the church include an annual Fourth of July picnic, tennis tournaments, language classes, and other events.[21]

One organization that is no longer active is the On Leong Merchants Association. The association's move to Chartres Street precipitated the original Chinatown enclave to move to East Downtown. In many ways, it was the area's focal point,

*The local Chinese Baptist Church had three iterations that moved alongside the community. The second church, shown here, relocated closer to Chartres Street and Old Chinatown at 1823 Lamar Street.*

Photo courtesy of the Chinese Baptist Church at www.cbchouston.org.

as businesses and CACA headquarters popped up around it; however, two main factors led to the institution's decline. First, its designation as the place where new immigrants found support, community members networked, and celebrations were held was supplanted by the rise of family associations and CACA. To illustrate this overlap, Harry Gee Jr. mentioned that he annually attended eight New Year's parties between On Leong, the Hip Sing, and the family associations like the Gees, Chens, and Joes. Second, in the early 1990s, accusations arose that the On Leong was an illegal gambling venue. After the FBI charged the Chicago branch with gambling in 1990, it investigated the Houston branch in 1991, although the Houston On Leong was never charged. The association survived long enough to move to Bellaire Chinatown, but its old building was demolished in 2011 to make way for a hotel that never materialized.[22]

Although the On Leong Association and Old Chinatown are but memories, Houston's Chinese community thrives. CACA, the Gee and other family associations, the Miss Chinatown pageant, and the Chinese Baptist Church continue to be flagships of the local Chinese American community, along with the new organizations, events, institutions, and businesses that have sprung up in recent years. Indeed, many of the ways Houston's larger community has changed are in response to the needs of the Asian populations. Immigration from Asia has boomed since those first immigrants arrived in the nineteenth century. The *Houston Chronicle* reported that the 2020 Census showed nearly 620,000 people who identified as Asian American called the Houston Metropolitan Area home, leading to the continued expansion of Bellaire Chinatown to serve the growing community.[23]

Visit Mapping Houston's Old Chinatown,
**https://mhoc.projects.dhcf.uh.edu/**

**Daniel Killian** is an M.A. student at the University of Houston studying public history. He has served as a research assistant for the Center for Public History and interns for the Mapping Houston's Old Chinatown project. He holds the John L. Nau III Research Assistanship.

*Ana Eigler, Sephardic, married her husband Robert Eigler, Ashkenazi, in 1973. They maintained a bicultural Jewish household of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish practices alongside their shared Latin heritage.*

All photos courtesy of Ana Eigler.

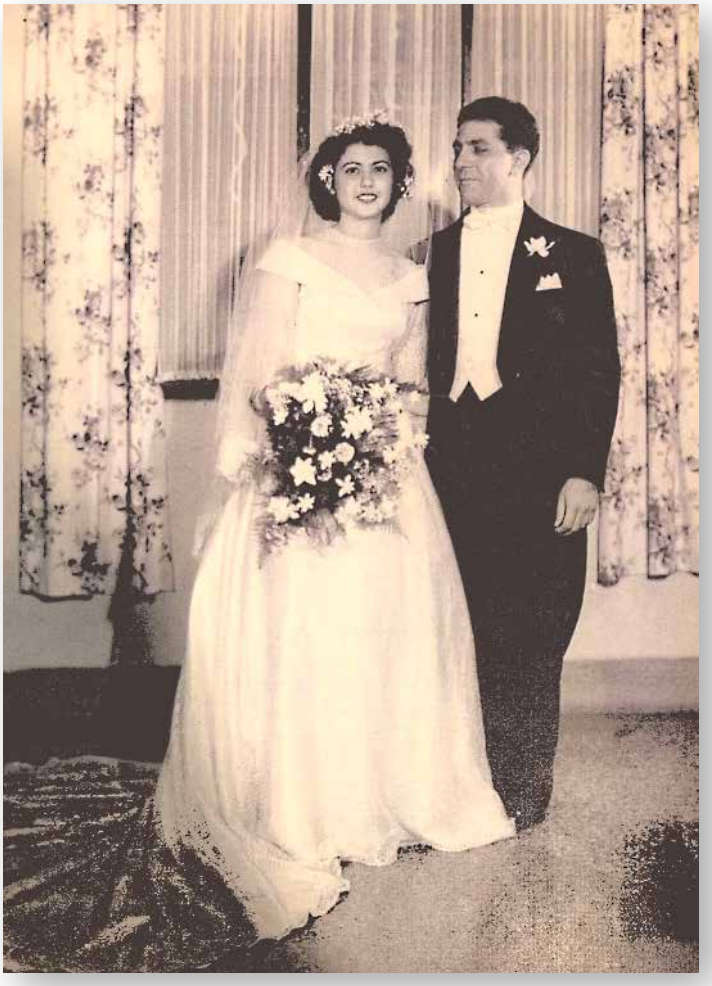
# Between Two Worlds:
## *Ana Eigler's Journey of Bicultural Belonging*

*By Miranda Ruzinsky*

This is a story about identity—self-asserted and externally imposed. Ana Eigler, a Sephardic Jew from Latin America, understood this from a young age. She was the "Jewish girl" in her home country and the "Latin woman" in the United States. In an American Jewish community dominated by Ashkenazi culture (European-based), she is Sephardic, an umbrella term used to describe Jewish heritage from the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa.[1] How did she come to embrace her bicultural identity amid constant discrimination? How did she transcend traditional Jewish gender roles to become a successful businesswoman and diversity expert? Eigler's story is an empowering narrative that spotlights an often-overlooked Jewish minority, reflects the universal themes of the immigration process, and demonstrates the significant roles immigrants play in American society.

*Eigler's maternal grandparents, Hanna Abbo Toledano, left, and Simón Abadi Hibiba, right, immigrated to Colombia shortly after marrying in 1923. They had two daughters born there, including Eigler's mother who received her papers after the family moved to Maracaibo, Venezuela, in 1928, making her a Venezuelan citizen.*

Eigler can trace the Sephardic roots of her maternal and paternal ancestry back several generations. The last names of her maternal grandparents, Abadi and Abbo, first appear in fourteenth and sixteenth century Spanish records. Throughout the next few centuries, her family members moved eastward through countries like Morocco, Algeria, Italy, Syria, and Iran. They settled in the Middle Eastern cities of Safed and Tiberias in the first half of the nineteenth century, experiencing the area's exchange among several ruling powers including the Ottoman Empire, Britain, and Israel. According to family history, her grandparents, Hanna Abbo Toledano and Simón Abadi Hibiba, were an unlikely pair. Hanna, born into a prestigious family of Rabbis and scholars in the historic region of Safed, was not expected to marry the adventurous and dark-skinned Simón, the child of working-class Jews from the port city of Tiberias. Despite initial concerns from Hanna's parents,



*Eigler's young parents met in Maracaibo where her father traveled for work. They married and settled in Caracas in the 1940s, raising three children as members of the city's large Jewish community.*

the couple received consent to marry in 1923 and eventually immigrated to Maracaibo, a city in Northwestern Venezuela, in 1928.[2]

The youngest of seven kids, Eigler's father was born into a successful Egyptian merchant family that relocated to Manchester, England. When he turned sixteen, he followed his older brothers to South America, where he traveled around the continent before settling in Venezuela. His first job as a door-to-door salesperson led him to Maracaibo, where he met Eigler's mother. At this time, it was commonplace in traditional Jewish families to invite young Jewish men into their home to assess their potential as a future son-in-law. Thus, Eigler's parents met when her father was welcomed into her mother's family home. Though expected to marry the oldest daughter, he chose Eigler's mother and the two settled in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, to start a family.

This is where Eigler's personal story begins. Ana Cohen was born on September 15, 1952, the youngest of three children. She described mid-century Caracas as safe and open, with very little crime, where people could keep "being children for a long, long time." The local Jewish community, numbering 40,000 people, was divided

*Eigler, left, was the youngest of three siblings with an older brother and older sister. Compared to her siblings, Eigler always felt more distant to her mother, who took Eigler's siblings on a trip to recover her health soon after giving birth to Eigler, leaving the newborn alone with her father.*

between the liberal middle-class Ashkenazim and the conservative working-class Sephardim. For Eigler, it was not easy being Jewish in a 98 percent Catholic country. She attended a private Catholic school from kindergarten through high school where she "received messages that being Jewish was not a good thing." Nor could she hide her "Jewishness." Her maiden name, Cohen, was known to be of Jewish origin. Every day at school, she sat outside alone for an hour and a half during the Catechism classes, and during services, she remained the only student standing as her parents demanded that she never kneel to Jesus Christ. She was also the target of continual antisemitic gossip that claimed Jews murdered Jesus Christ and had tails between their legs. Considering all this, it is not surprising that Eigler rarely advertised her ethnic origins for fear of being publicly shamed.[3]

Eigler remembers growing up in a family that combined the Venezuelan and Sephardic cultures. Spanish was the household language, and the food was a mix of national cuisine alongside Algerian and Moroccan dishes. Her family was what were known as "twice-a-year Jews," meaning they only attended services for the two High

*Attending a private Catholic school for most of her youth, Eigler did not engage with her Jewish peers until a Jewish youth group formed when she was in high school. She met her husband, who was in college at the time, through the club.*

*The Eiglers were part of the early Jewish settlement in Fondren Southwest in the 1970s due to its affordability and proximity to the Jewish Community Center (JCC). Today, the area is known for its large Jewish population. This was their first home in Houston.*

Holidays, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.[4] They did not celebrate Hannukah, but had an alternative and secretive tradition. Every Christmas, her mother would buy a plastic Christmas tree, and the kids would receive presents on December 25th. Eigler still loves to help her friends with their Christmas decorations. What her family lacked in religious knowledge, they made up for in reputation. Eigler described her father as a leading businessman in the local Jewish community and president of their synagogue. He worked alongside the Ashkenazim leaders to help bridge the gap between the two Jewish ethnic groups.

A significant aspect of Sephardic culture that defined Eigler's childhood was its patriarchy that emphasized distinct roles for men and women. "I grew up with a lot of very clear gender stereotypes that I used to believe," she said. "What women could do and what guys could do. I mean, it was, like, really very explicit." In traditional Judaism, families expect women to marry within their community and fulfill the role of homemaker and mother. They are forbidden from performing certain religious tasks and must sit in a separate section during prayer services. Eigler's father expected his daughters to only date Jews and did not believe that women needed a higher education or a professional career. Once he told her, "It is such a pity that you are a girl because if you were a boy, you would be taking care of the business, in charge of the business." Eigler would thank her rebellious sister for her opportunity to attend university in Venezuela and graduate with a degree in early childhood education. Unfortunately, the final straw for Eigler's father was her sister's relationship with a non-Jewish boy. He did not speak to her for seven years.[5]

While Eigler followed her sister into college, she did not dare to stray from her father's rules about dating: "He told me that the first guy that holds my hand, I have to marry and that's what happened." Eigler met her husband Robert, an Ashkenazi Jew, when she was in high school and he, being five years older, was in college. They became close while attending social events of the local Jewish youth group, Hillel. They married in 1973 and soon headed to New York for two years while Robert earned his master's degree at Cornell University. Here, Eigler experienced her first bout of culture shock. The United States was much more diverse than she had thought, and much more racist. "Seeing how Latinos and African Americans were considered inferior. And then Native Americans," she lamented. She took English courses to improve her language ability and formed a tight friendship with a French woman and Japanese woman. "Neither one [of us] could speak each other's language," she recalled. "We spoke in English among ourselves, so, can you imagine? I mean, we struggled, but I started learning a lot." The family returned to Venezuela for a brief time in 1975 before jetting off again to permanently settle in the United States. This time they picked a city with weather that resembled tropical Venezuela.[6]

Eigler landed in Houston, Texas, in 1978 with her husband and first child, Ariane, who was born in 1975. They stayed downtown for the first week and received quite

*Eigler and her family celebrate her graduation at the University of Houston. Proud to graduate* summa cum laude *as a mother of two and non-native English speaker, she earned her bachelor's degree in 1984 and her master's in social work in 1987.*

*Eigler (bottom right) is pictured with several of her lifelong friends, many of whom she met through her close ties to the Houston Latin Jewish community. They have been celebrating the Jewish holidays together for decades.*

a unique initial impression of the city. "We came during rodeo time … and I saw everybody with the belt buckles and the little things and the horses in the street," she said. "It was the parade but then, we didn't realize it was the parade. And the boots. And I was like, 'oh this is like the John Wayne movies we watch.'"

Though the Wild West would end up being Hollywood fiction, Eigler loved Houston from the start. The family hired a Jewish realtor and settled in Fondren Southwest near the Jewish Community Center (JCC). Though there was a Sephardic synagogue in Houston, Eigler and her husband joined a conservative congregation, Brith Shalom, that reflected the liberal values of Ashkenazi and mainstream American Judaism.[7]

At thirty years old, a mother of two, and a non-native English speaker, Eigler decided to return to school. Like many U.S. higher education institutions, University of Houston (UH) forced Eigler to repeat her bachelor's degree because it would not recognize her Venezuelan college credits. "I was just crying at home thinking, 'in Venezuela, I was somebody. I was already teaching at the university. I had a good life, and here, I have to start again?'" She soon rallied her spirits and reframed the situation. "I have a life to live and either I cry for what I used to be, or I just do it again."[8] She started at UH as a commuter attending class one day a week and gradually increased her workload as her children entered the public school system. She graduated *summa cum laude* in 1984 with a degree in human development and family studies (then part of the Home Economics Department). After working for a year and receiving the advice that she could earn more money with a higher degree, she returned to UH and received her master's in social work in 1987.

Eigler credits her sociology and psychology courses with helping her through a personal identity crisis as well as setting her on the path to championing minority rights, which she calls her "life work." She compared her assimilation process to that of a teenager who is "trying to figure out where do you fit and who you are." She felt torn between aligning herself with the local Jewish community or the larger Hispanic population. After going through school and experiencing the multiculturalism of Houston, she learned that she "could be all those things at the same time and also be American." Unfortunately, that did not translate to how other people perceived her.[9]

Many times, strangers discriminated against Eigler for her appearance and accent. People told her to leave the country and accused her of not paying taxes. She was mistaken for a housekeeper and assumed by others to be a poor English speaker. She felt forced to always dress better and emphasize her credentials for the fear of being considered unqualified. "So, that made me really aware, like, when you have dark colored skin like African Americans and you cannot change it, you are automatically, whether you perceive yourself that way or not, … perceived as Black," she said. "The more I realized all of the injustice, and I always felt bad about the underdog, so that's the main reason why I went for social work."[10]

This empathy, alongside her multicultural background, bilingualism, and training, helped Eigler become a leading force of diversity and antiracism in the Houston community. She worked at United Way for several years before leaving to successfully run her own consulting and training business in diversity for twenty years. She worked as a consultant to healthcare organizations and medical centers, and as a contracted consultant with Chevron for the last thirteen years of her career, providing cultural training for their expatriates assigned to over eighty international locations. Her extensive service resume includes impactful leadership and volunteer roles. Eigler returned to United Way to serve as their director of volunteers and headed Project Blueprint, a program that provides training to

*Eigler, left, joined by educator Dorothy Caram, center, receives recognition for her work on empowering the city's minority leaders from Houston City Council member Graciela Saenz, right. Eigler worked extensively on minority rights and youth education throughout her career as a diversity consultant and community leader.*


*The Sephardic Latinx Oral History Project, a collaboration between the University of Houston and Holocaust Museum Houston's Latinx Initiatives Program, explores Sephardic Latinx history using oral histories. Participants, left to right, included students Lynnex Rougeaux, Miranda Ruzinsky, and Alena Aguilar; UH professor Dr. Mark Goldberg; and interviewees Ana Eigler, and Jacob Varon.*

Photo courtesy of Holocaust Museum Houston

ethnic minority leaders to become board members. She was a community organizer in the majority Latino neighborhood of Gulfton, a volunteer for child advocacy with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and a board member of the Center for Healing and Racism. Additionally, she served on the mayor's drug abuse task force, and her latest philanthropic initiative provided support to caregivers whose spouses have dementia. "When I was doing my work on diversity," she said, "I could mention all of my different backgrounds and people were, like, 'Oh, wow, you fit all of the boxes.'"[11]

Alongside work, Eigler enjoyed embracing her Venezuelan and Jewish cultures inside and outside the home. She found her "family by choice" when she joined Hebraica Houston, a short-lived but close-knit community of local Jewish immigrants from Latin America that socialized and celebrated Jewish holidays together. "Forty+ years, we have been friends," she said. "All of the bad things that happen in life and all of the good things that happen in life, we share them." She described her personal relationship with her bicultural heritage as having "gained instead of losing." She maintained customs like family meals and enjoys cooking traditional foods like Venezuelan *arepas* and her famous Sephardic *charoset*. She participated in Jewish philanthropic efforts with women's organizations like Hadassah and the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).[12]

Eigler also belatedly celebrated her B'nai Mitzvah, a rite of passage to adulthood for Jewish teenagers. She was not allowed to do this as a woman in her traditional Jewish upbringing, but in America as an adult, she bravely learned enough Hebrew to stand in front of the congregation and read the Torah. Of course, her father, who flew in from Venezuela for the event, was shocked. "My husband asked him, 'Weren't you proud of Anita that she did that?' And he said, '… it hurts but then, you like it.'… That was my father."[13]

Though Eigler can claim her life in America as one of family, friends, and community, she understands her Jewish ancestors who, for centuries, left their homelands and families behind for the promise of a better life. She specifically noted the price a child pays for living in a different country than their aging parents. Eigler's parents only visited two times a year because, as her father said, "people are like fish and … they start smelling after 3 days."[14] When her father retired and transferred his business to Eigler's brother, her parents lived in Israel for twenty years before returning to Venezuela for health reasons. Eigler's sister (who patched up her relationship with her parents) moved into the same building and supported her parents. Being so far away, Eigler constantly worried that she could not be there for her parents when they were sick or at the moment of their deaths. Her father eventually passed away twenty-two years ago and her mother eleven years ago.

Eigler was smiling as she showed me pictures of her children and grandchildren, and even an amazing poem by her granddaughter whose topic of having a bicultural identity crisis paralleled that of Eigler's when she first arrived in Houston. "We definitely have a better life than we would have had [in Venezuela]," she said, "but it was with sacrifices."[15]

**Miranda Ruzinsky** is an MA student in public history at the University of Houston. A Lydia Mendoza Fellow in the Center for Mexican American and Latino/a Studies and the Center for Public History, she received the 2025 Harris County Historical Society Award for Excellence.

*Ana and Robert Eigler, on the right in the front row, are joined by their extended family at their daughter's wedding. Now a grandmother, Eigler enjoys sharing her bicultural heritage with the family's younger generations.*

# *Storyteller of Today:* Dima Suki's Journey from Lebanon to America

*By Maya Bouchebl*


*In this collage artwork, Dima Suki depicts her home city, Beirut. The large Arabic text reads, "Take me, plant me in Lebanese soil," a lyric from a song by the famous Lebanese singer Fairouz. The song evokes imagery of picturesque villages, fruit groves, rolling hills, and roosting birds.*[2]

The first wave of Lebanese immigrants came to the United States in the late nineteenth century, as thousands of Middle Easterners left their countries due to turmoil in the Ottoman Empire. Today, most people of Lebanese descent live outside of the country, with one of the biggest Lebanese American communities in Houston.[1] One notable member of this community is Dr. Dima Abisaid Suki: a retired health-care professional by day and an artist and writer by night. After immigrating from Lebanon to Houston in 1988, she studied epidemiology and biostatistics and worked as a medical researcher at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. She eventually became a professor and director of Clinical Research Operations for the Department of Neurosurgery. Also an artist and writer, she expresses her immigrant experience and sentiment through her creative work. Suki shared her story from her childhood in Lebanon to her current life in Houston in a recent interview.

Suki was born in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, in the mid-1960s. She had an uneventful early childhood, with many happy memories of playing with her cousins and visiting beautiful landmarks across the country. Life became more difficult, however, when the Lebanese Civil War began in 1975. Many readers may be unfamiliar with the history of this conflict, especially since the war's background is so complicated that many Lebanese people struggle to explain it. In a nutshell, multiple political factions with militias and foreign allies were engaged in an armed struggle for power over the country for fifteen years, during which residents suffered through dangerous living conditions.

For years, Suki and her family were "confined to small areas of the country [in] fear of being killed or kidnapped by … their own countrymen or foreigners who took part in the war." Many were caught in the crossfire between the warring factions or subjected to abuse by occupying forces. She went on to describe the notorious military checkpoints: "We used to get stopped and insulted at these checkpoints by all sorts of disgusting people. … [W]e used to consider ourselves lucky that nothing worse happened at those checkpoints, because sometimes people got beaten [and] kidnapped."[3]

Despite the dangers for all those years, Suki, her peers, and society were expected to carry on as usual. The Lebanese prioritized education so the schools did their best to continue operating. Oftentimes, Suki studied for her exams by

*Dima Suki attended the American University of Beirut in the early 1980s. Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea on one side and the bustling city streets on the other, the campus is considered one of the most beautiful in the world.*

All photos courtesy of Dima Suki unless otherwise noted.

*Suki cherished many special memories from her childhood, including the birth of her youngest sister in the 1970s.*

candlelight while hiding from bombs in the safest corner of her house. She and her friends were sometimes "under bombs one day and partying the next." She reflected, "It was very interesting. We took it one day at a time."[4] They found moments of reprieve that made life bearable. Suki attended the American University of Beirut, receiving her bachelor's and master's degrees in nutrition. She developed lifelong friendships, fell in love with her future husband, and traveled throughout Europe. Together, the couple moved to America.

*"Sometimes we could be under bombs one day and partying the next. ... We took it one day at a time."*
*– Dima Suki*

In 1988, the civil war was only two years away from its conclusion, although it did not seem like it at the time. Suki and her then-fiancé both wanted to continue their education, but the American University of Beirut had suspended its PhD programs. Like many others at the time, they decided that moving to a different country offered their best option to achieve their goals. The couple believed Houston was the ideal place to begin their lives together, as they both had their eyes on the University of Texas (UT) School of Public Health, and Suki's fiancé already had relatives living in the city.

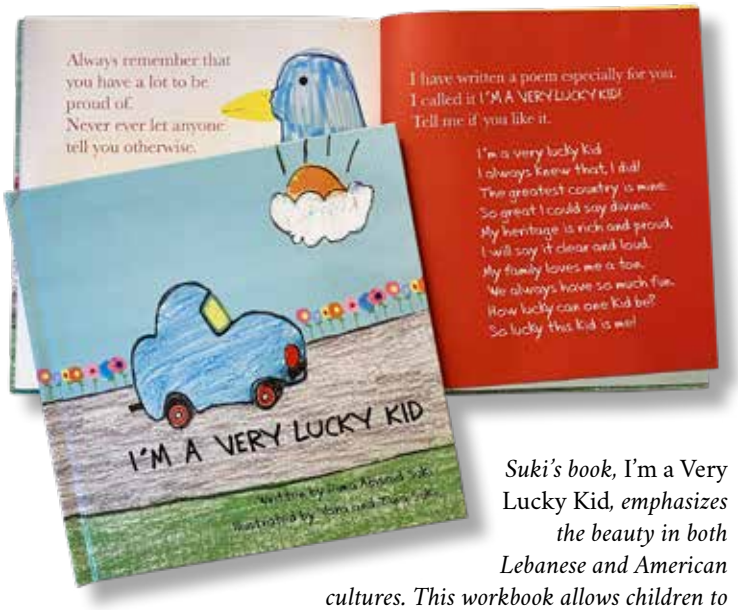
The path forward was clear, but the process of moving to America felt daunting. The American embassy in Lebanon was closed, so visa applicants had to take potentially dangerous trips to the embassy in Damascus, Syria, instead. Suki and her mother took a taxi to the embassy and arrived before sunrise, only to find a long line of Lebanese citizens already anxiously waiting. Suki worried as she watched most of the applicants leave their interviews looking disappointed. She thought about the "lifetime['s] worth of hopes and dreams" she planned with her husband, all hanging in the balance of one stamp on a passport. The agent gave a once-over of her acceptance letter from UT School of Public Health, stamped her passport, then said, "Good luck in America." Suki joined her husband in Houston where they pursued public health education and careers, and, as the years progressed, they became American citizens.

*Suki considered her time at the American University of Beirut to be some of the best years of her life. The future seemed bleak at the time, but she made a new life for herself in the United States.*

While Lebanon's diversity exposed Suki to western media and cultures that smoothed her transition, it did not prepare her for some basic customs of American life. For example, people in Lebanon tend to be generous with blessings, using special terms of praise for ordinary occasions such as getting a haircut. Thus, after Suki's first haircut in America, she was surprised to find that her co-workers did not make a show of commenting on it. On another occasion when visiting a friend, she followed the Lebanese custom in which guests politely decline the first offer of food, knowing that the host or hostess will be persistent until they accept. But when Suki made her first refusal, no more offers followed, causing her to realize Americans do not follow the same social customs. To Suki, these were humorous adjustments she made to American culture.

*Surrounded by her family, Suki and her fiancé celebrate their engagement in the 1980s. They planned to get married, then start their doctoral degrees in the United States.*

Suki always believed that Houston was then and still is a welcoming city to immigrants. Her new friends and coworkers graciously welcomed her by sharing American traditions and holidays. Houston provided her plenty of opportunities to connect with people of all backgrounds. Suki and her husband made friends with other Lebanese and Arab immigrants, as well as people from other cultures. She believes "immigrants have a way of navigating towards




*Suki's book,* I'm a Very Lucky Kid, *emphasizes the beauty in both Lebanese and American cultures. This workbook allows children to document stories about themselves and their families.*

each other" and that "it doesn't matter if they're from the same country or not."[5]

Like many immigrants, Suki thrived in America but still wanted to maintain a connection to her home country. Although she felt grateful for the opportunities moving to the United States provided her and her family, she admitted, "I feel at home here, but a part of me still lives there." She paraphrased a Lebanese writer who compared it to having "two souls, one lives here, one lives there." Though she tries to visit Lebanon frequently, finding the time is difficult. She celebrates her immigration experiences through her art and writing, which allow her to "fill the void and quench the thirst" of nostalgia.[6]

Suki's most recent project, a children's book called *I'm a Very Lucky Kid,* teaches Lebanese American children about the beauty in both of their cultures. Interested in researching early immigrants, she also collaborated on publications about immigrants who came from the Middle East to America between the late 1800s and 1940s. She is fascinated that unlike modern immigrants who research where to relocate, early immigrants left their lives behind and "journeyed into the unknown." Poverty and a lack of formal education did not deter these communities from navigating unfamiliar lands. Her book honors everyone's stories of "hopes, fears, struggles, and successes."[7]

Studying this period reveals the rich history of Lebanese immigrants in Houston. They first came to America in the late nineteenth century, when their homeland and the region were controlled by the Ottoman Empire, which was facing a period of economic stagnation and social turmoil. Many residents of Lebanon and Syria left their countries in search of better conditions.[8]

Texas was a popular destination from the start, and in 1910, had the fourth largest population of Lebanese immigrants in the United States. Though many arrived as poor merchants and small business owners, their circumstances improved over time. Many found community through social clubs popularized in the Victorian Era. In 1933, the wealthy Jamail family founded the United Jamail Club in Houston, which became one of the largest Arab social clubs in the South.[9] Others formed similar groups, and a network of social organizations emerged.

*Immigration from Lebanon to the United States started in the nineteenth century. Depicted in this photo is an early immigrant woman from Mount Lebanon and her two American-born children.*

Photo courtesy of Dr. Najia Hassen White.

*The symbolism of the phoenix resonates with some Lebanese because they link its ability to be reborn from ashes to Lebanon's ability to withstand disaster. Phoenix also shares the Greek root word for Phoenician, used to describe ancient inhabitants of Lebanon.*

Photo courtesy of the Houston Lebanese Festival.

Many immigrants became important local figures in business and the professions. One particularly notable individual was Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, known as the father of cardiovascular surgery, born in 1908 to Lebanese immigrant parents. After training as a surgeon and serving in the U.S. Army's Medical Corps in World War II, he joined the faculty at Baylor College of Medicine in 1948. Over his 75-year career, he pioneered surgeries and invented medical devices that have saved countless lives. For example, he performed the first successful coronary bypass operation in 1964, followed by the first multiple-organ transplant in 1968. It is estimated that he operated on at least sixty thousand patients, including world


*Dima Suki's artwork explores the complexities of feeling connected to two homes as a Lebanese American.*

leaders like the Duke of Windsor and Russian president Boris Yeltsin, elevating Houston's global reputation.[10]

Other notables include Nagreeb "Jim" Jamail who began by selling produce at the City Market in 1905. In 1946, he and his sons opened Jim Jamail & Sons Food Market in Montrose, which relocated to Kirby Drive in 1959 and became known as "the Tiffany's of food markets."[11] Abraham Jamail was Houston's most decorated World War II soldier. Michel Halbouty became a renowned geologist, wildcatter, and petroleum industry leader whose career spanned seven decades. And Jalal Antone founded Antone's Import Company, which produces one of Houston's favorite po-boys.

Houston's Lebanese immigrant community continued to grow over the years and experienced a surge during the civil war. Many of these newcomers were highly educated and drawn to Houston's thriving medical center or to its engineering companies.[12] Recently, organizations like Houston's American Lebanese Cultural Center (ALCC) and other organizations have emerged as spiritual successors to the social clubs popularized by early immigrants. The community has made efforts to share its culture with the city through events such as the Houston Lebanese Festival.

Suki finds joy in being an active member of the local Lebanese community and using her experience researching immigration to occasionally help with cultural events for the ALCC. For example, she uses old documents and photos to create historical exhibits. Her involvement in cultural organizations is one way she keeps Lebanon close to her heart, while embracing her American citizenship. Although some Lebanese immigrants find it challenging to maintain a connection to their homeland, the feeling of being split between two homes is an experience shared by many immigrants. To adjust, Suki and other immigrants learn about and celebrate their histories, sharing them with the larger community; and, in the process, they have helped make Houston the vibrant multicultural city it is today. HH

**Maya Bouchebl** is an M.A. student at the University of Houston studying public history and European history. She has interned at the *Houston History* magazine and worked as a research assistant for the 100 Years of Stories project in the Center for Public History.

*Lizbeth Ortiz, Houston artist and founder of the Frida Festival, shares her passion for the arts in a way that showcases her heritage and connects with her community.*

Photo courtesy of Anthony Rathbun Photography.

# Lizbeth Ortiz: Art in Action

*By Grace Jarman with Andres Rios*

In spring, as the air turns to the heat of a Houston summer, the streets are filled with vibrant colors, magnificent outfits, and, most importantly, unibrows. The Frida Kahlo festival, held annually since 2005, is a cornerstone of Houston's Latino community and celebrates one of Mexico's most widely renowned artists. Lizbeth Ortiz, organizer and founder of the festival, was born in Mexico City and moved to Houston when she was one year old. She explained, "My paternal grandfather had been a migrant worker, and my dad had been coming to the States early on. So … my dad knew that he wanted his family to … settle here and have his family here."[1] Ortiz's story is one of finding community, fostering empowerment through artistic expression, and discovering her passions while carrying on the East End's legacy of highly recognized activists and artists.

The twentieth century brought an influx of Hispanic immigrants to the East End, and with them came social and political change that inspired artists and activists who expanded Houston's cultural landscape. In 1910, only fifty people in Second Ward were Mexican-born and roughly 2,000 Houstonians were Mexican American.[2] In 2023, Hispanics made up 69.8 percent of the overall East End population, showing the vast community Mexican American and Latino immigrants have found in this area of Houston.[3]

Lizbeth Ortiz and her work with the Frida Festival were made possible by those who came before her and created a space where Mexican cultural pride could be shared with the world. By age five, she aspired to be a fashion designer and went on to attend Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (now Kinder HSPVA). Houston's East End offered Ortiz a place to discover her artistic abilities and to take pride in her heritage. "I didn't discover the East End until I was in high school because some classmates … lived there," she recalled. "I felt like I was in Mexico in a way, but here in Houston."[4]

Ortiz faced her share of struggles as she cultivated her artistic expression and found her way in the art world. Her journey as an artist began in New York City in 1994. She

*Lizbeth Ortiz welcomes guests at the art show for the Frida Festival at MECA in 2024.*

applied to Pratt Institute, got accepted into their fashion design school, arranged her housing, and then informed her parents of her plans. She attributed her independent nature to her personal experience, reflecting, "[As a first-generation immigrant] you have a different mentality. [It's] like, 'I need to do better and strive.' My family sacrifices are worth something, not in vain." Her parents, who knew Ortiz wanted to pursue a creative career, worked hard to pay the bills while she aimed to make a name for herself beyond Houston.[5]

Ortiz recalled the culture shock of a pedestrian-heavy city like New York compared to the car-dependent streets of Houston, and she began to rethink her mentality in this new place. The diverse life experiences of the people she encountered in New York inspired her, especially as she began meeting more people from different parts of Mexico. Meeting so many people from such varying backgrounds caused Ortiz to ask herself, "What do I bring to the table? What are my roots? And … who am I?" She turned to her Mexican roots, finding inspiration in the houses, sculptures, bright colors, and culture she had experienced before going to New York. These roots influenced some of her most fulfilling art pieces.

Ortiz was living in New York on September 11, 2001, when Flights 93 and 175 flew into the World Trade Center, another hit the Pentagon, and one crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. She recalled the feelings Americans dealt with in the wake of 9/11, reflecting, "It changed everyone's life in so many different ways. But it helped me look into my culture, again, to see how we celebrate the Day of the Dead, to find some reasoning and solace [in] what we're going through." She began to research and created her first community altar, adding, "I realized that the power of healing through art and *ofrenda*, an altar, … [and] I've made one ever since. …. I love telling people about it … almost preaching the power of healing through it."[6] She has made ofrendas ever since the tragedy. Healing through artistic expression is a key part of altars made for the Day of the Dead or Día de Muertos, a festive period where people pay their respects, celebrating family and friends who have died.

For Lizbeth Ortiz, finding power and meaning in life through art has been the mainstay of her life. Her passion for her work only increased when she returned to Houston in 2004. She found community with fellow artists in the city, where she felt instantly welcomed by her peers. She

*Ortiz's Corazón series is inspired by the Catholic Sacred Heart, such as the two examples shown here. She uses different materials such as paper, resin, and nails to create images of human hearts, each with unique symbolism,.*

All photos courtesy of Lizbeth Ortiz unless otherwise noted.

*Lizbeth Ortiz began creating community* ofrendas *(altars) following the tragedy of 9/11. Seeing their healing power, she has continued making them, including this community alter at MECA.*

rented a tin warehouse in the East End for just $100 a month. Had it not lacked air conditioning, it would have been the perfect space. Nonetheless, she enjoyed the lower rent compared to New York and opted to work at night. She enjoyed having a dedicated work space, reveling in the opportunity to meet like-minded artists in the area and grow artistically.

Describing her style as "creative ADD," Ortiz has explored various mediums along her journey, including jewelry, sewing, and sculpting. Lizbeth's perspective on her artistic life has also evolved over the years. After returning to her roots in Houston, she felt that she had finally found her voice through creative exploration. "I felt like I had to have results … showing in the gallery and selling [my] work in order to be validated as an artist," she admitted. Eventually, she learned to respect her "creative inner voice." This realization changed her life. "It gave me that freedom," she said. "I'm not going to depend on how much money I'm making in order to say I'm successful or not." Instead, she asks herself, "Have I been … inspired by something? Or, for a project, have I been able to accomplish and feel good about it?"[7] Her mindset to follow her inner voice is a valuable goal and lesson for any aspiring artist.

Soon, Ortiz conceptualized an entire day celebrating her fellow Mexicana, unapologetic artist Frida Kahlo. With no air conditioning in her studio, Ortiz and her collaborators arranged for the celebration to take place outside on July 6, 2005, on the anniversary of Kahlo's birthday. They invited vendors and a DJ to create a festive atmosphere. This marked the beginning of her work in the East End, where she aimed to inspire the community and allow people the space to "tap into [and awaken] their inner artist." She felt that people often deal with stress or conflict with one another. Sometimes, they carry an emotional void, adding, "I really feel that art can help fill those voids."[8]

The Frida Kahlo Festival brings people together, locally and internationally, to appreciate her art and recognize its international impact. The festival celebrates immigrants' dual identity in a space where they are welcomed and empowered in their unique culture. With humble beginnings, the festival drew a crowd of 800 to 1,000 people. As its popularity grew, the number of participants increased to more than 30,000 people between 2018 and 2023.[9]

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival had to downsize to a pop-up shop and gallery featuring local artists. The socially distanced celebration enforced a limit of fifteen guests every thirty minutes but gave repeat festival-goers some sense of normalcy during a tumultuous time.

Now, the festival is better than ever. Ortiz recounted the experience of seeing the "little festival [go] from that

*The Frida Festival has grown beyond the outdoor events and vendors to include a fundraiser and fashion show at the Ballroom at Bayou Place.*

*In 2005 to commemorate Frida Kahlo, one of Mexico's greatest artists, Ortiz founded the Frida Festival, shown here in 2018. Her goal is to make Houston the U.S. "Frida fan destination."*

sweaty warehouse [twenty] years ago to a beautiful ballroom. People dressed up in the fashion show, and it was wonderful."[10] Ortiz and her collaborators have created an iconic Houston festival in the East End to celebrate Mexican art, inspire one another, and create community together. The festival is also collaborating with Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, on the exhibit *Frida: The Making of an Icon*, on display January 19 to May 17, 2026.

Aside from her work with the Frida Festival, Ortiz has had a diverse career and has worn many different hats throughout her life. The organization, MECA (Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts), has been a passion project that began with painting murals at KHSPVA's historic campus. Ortiz was the visual and performing arts coordinator for MECA in 2006 and, after ten years working for a law firm, she was asked to return as a contract curator during the pandemic. Her relationship with MECA led to her involvement in their Day of the Dead festival as well as connecting the organization to the Frida Festival. Ortiz likes giving back to the community. She explained, MECA "provide[s] lots of classes to low-income inner-city youth, and I really like bringing artists to show and talk to the kids about it. [Not everyone] has the resources to take their kids to the museum or to an art opening … we bring it to them. It's very rewarding, on so many levels."[11] Ortiz has also done this by working with the University of Houston Center for Mexican American and Latino/a Studies to include her art on Latino cARTographies, a digital board that provides an interactive experience, taking art to the people in multiple locations across the city.

Ortiz's work also became the face of one of the most popular music awards in Latin America. In 2008, the Latin Grammys held an art competition in Houston seeking an official artist for its promotional materials. Fifteen finalists competed to represent the city and feature their work on awards invitations, tickets, posters, programs, and more.[12] Ortiz received a call encouraging her to participate, and she immediately envisioned using the Houston skyline, inspired by her view of the city from her MECA office.[13]

Ortiz described her process, saying, "I turned all the buildings into instruments typically used in Latin music, like the conga, the maracas, and the accordion. I did the sky as *Starry Night* swirls and had the full moon with the profile of a rabbit, which is an Aztec legend."[14] The piece, titled *Latin Grammy Night in Tejas*, featured her trademark style of vibrant coloring and multimedia textures. Upon winning the contest, Latin Recording Academy President Gabriel Abaroa congratulated Ortiz: "Her art reflects her passion and love for Texas culture and tradition … [she captured] the rich spirit and prestige of our Latin Grammy Award."[15]

In 2022, Ortiz and a group of other artists collaborated on the Healing Uvalde Mural Project, a series of twenty-one murals dedicated to the nineteen children and two teachers killed at Robb Elementary School on May 24. Abel Ortiz, professor and owner of Art Lab Gallery, conceived the idea. He believes that artists possess a gift that can be used to

*During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Frida Festival was held in a gallery that limited the number of visitors at a time but, nonetheless, allowed the community to celebrate Frida's art and retain a sense of normalcy.*

*The Frida Festival is the perfect place for young people to learn about the contributions of Frida Kahlo and the importance of art and self-expression to society. These girls attended the festival in 2015.*


*For Uvalde community members, participating in the Healing Uvalde mural was an important part of the grieving process. Parents, children, and other residents joined Ortiz to paint items that reminded them of their loved ones' favorite shows, foods, sports teams, and more.*

Photo courtesy of Abel Ortiz.

give back to their communities, especially to heal in times of tragedy.[16] While Lizbeth knows the project cannot erase the grief people feel, "the goal is to not forget [the victims], to [honor] them [by] keeping their memory alive."[17]

Lizbeth's work depicts an ofrenda decorated with the children's favorite items—an Astros baseball cap, Spongebob's pineapple, and the heart logo from Bad Bunny's album, *Un Verano Sin Ti*, and others. Monarch butterflies flutter around the altar. Overlooking the ofrenda is La Virgen de Guadalupe, a symbol of motherhood for Mexican Catholics. Friends and family members of the victims offered their own touches to the mural, leaving a piece of themselves and their loved ones in the artwork. "I hope that people can stroll down that alley and smile," Ortiz said. Indeed, those close to the victims often have dinner or coffee in front of the murals.[18] For birthdays, they decorate the murals with balloons and flowers. She touched the lives of those impacted by the tragedy by offering a space where they can heal and celebrate those who lost their lives just as she did after 9/11.


*Ortiz's ofrenda mural helps people remember the children as they were and what they loved, as seen in this close-up of one section. It gives visitors a chance to focus on the children's lives rather than the tragedy.*

Photo courtesy of Abel Ortiz.

**Grace Jarman** is a senior majoring in history and journalism at the University of Houston and is set to graduate in December of 2025.

**Andres Rios** earned a BA in history at the University of Houston and interned at *Houston History*.

# FROM ONE PLACE TO THE NEXT:

## The Story of Veronica Fahys

*By Adithi Nythruva*

Since the nation's inception, immigrants have molded the United States into the "land of the free and the home of the brave." From establishing successful businesses to introducing their cultural traditions, immigrants have worked hard to make a place for themselves in American society. For cities like Houston, which boasts being one of the country's most diverse urban areas, the efforts of its immigrant communities are evident on every corner. From its architecture and paintings to small restaurants and shops, immigrants have left their cultural legacies in a journey that Veronica Fahys knows all too well. Fahys became a naturalized citizen in 1992, but her road to the United States wound through numerous cities and countries before she settled in Houston.

Veronica's paternal grandparents, France and Ivanka Zuzek (pronounced Zhuzhek), fled Slovenia as refugees with their children shortly after World War II. Although the Axis powers had occupied the republic during the war, the Communist Party rose to power afterward. Like many Slovenians and families from the other five republics making up Yugoslavia, the Zuzeks gambled on a new life by escaping the communist regime. Veronica's maternal grandparents, the Mele family, also fled from the wartime violence, which saw cities on the Slovenia-Italy border shift national boundaries. Veronica's elders spoke of "[living] in different refugee encampments in Italy and in Germany," waiting for a country to accept them. When her parents, Andres Zuzek and Isabel Mele, were about five years old, Argentina opened its doors to them, having passed a new constitution affirming that family background would not determine its immigration decisions.[1]

Following the war, a robust Slovenian community developed in Buenos Aires; for Veronica's parents, it felt like home. After attending college in São Paulo, Brazil and graduate school in Delft, Netherlands, Andres returned to Argentina, where he married Isabel, and they started a family. Veronica was born in Buenos Aires on November 22, 1970, and was just two years old when Texas Instruments transferred her father to Rio de Janeiro to continue his work as a geophysicist.

*Veronica and her aunt, Sister Rezka Zuzek, visit the* Christ the Redeemer *statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1974. Visiting the statue is one of Veronica's many fond childhood memories of Brazil.*

All photos courtesy of Veronica Fahys unless otherwise noted.

Today, Veronica cherishes her memories of Brazil, having spent many days visiting beaches with her younger brother and mother. The moves exposed Veronica to a unique blend of Slovenian and Latin American cultures, including the languages. By the age of four, she was proficient in speaking Slovenian with her parents and Portuguese with the housekeepers and visitors to their home.

In 1975, Veronica moved again, but this time Texas Instruments relocated the family to Richardson, Texas, a large Dallas-area suburb. Veronica felt the unfamiliarity of her surroundings compared to South America, from navigating a city lacking public transportation to the challenges of learning a third language. She recalls playing with other children and struggling to comprehend what they said, despite trying her best to learn the language and adapt to her surroundings. Over time, Veronica and her brother learned English by watching public television programs like *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*. Looking back, she affirmed that learning multiple languages was much easier as a child than as an adult.

After a short stay in Richardson, Andres's next work assignment, now with Exxon, took the family to Miami, Florida, in 1979. Like many immigrants, as Veronica became more acquainted with her surroundings, she naturally integrated the customs she grew up with into her American life.[2] As she continued learning English in school, she slowly stopped speaking Slovenian with her parents and began responding to them in English, which became her primary language. Along with reading, writing, and speaking English in school and with friends, she also learned Spanish. At the same time, her proficiency in Portuguese faded with lack of use.

Veronica's experiences with cultural assimilation offer a nuanced perspective to her story. On the one hand, she felt closely connected to her American identity like a U.S. citizen,

*Veronica's paternal grandparents, Ivanka Zuzek (nee Novak) and France Zuzek, married on November 15, 1920.*

*Veronica's maternal grandparents, Ivan Vinko Mele and Rozalija Mele (nee Pleško) stayed at a refugee camp in Servigliano, Italy. The couple is shown here holding their six-month-old daughter Isabel, Veronica's mother, in the spring of 1946.*

but, on the other hand, she did not understand why she held a green card. In Miami, Veronica's family found a tight-knit community of Argentinians. Even though her parents had befriended other South Americans in Richardson, Veronica found a "little South America" of her own in Miami. She described several get-togethers the family attended where a "South American spirit" flowed, and the parties with beloved friends lasted into the night.

When asked if she felt more Slovenian or Argentinian, Veronica said it was difficult to choose one identity. Instead, she related to both cultures in their own way. Unlike her cousins living in Argentina who were surrounded by other Slovenians and their activities, Veronica's immediate family was her sole guide for understanding her Slovenian heritage. She knew Slovenia had been part of Yugoslavia "by force but not by choice," and her pride for her heritage was innate. Through her elders, she knew she would always be Slovenian.

During a 1980 visit to Argentina at the age of ten, Veronica experienced an unexpected culture shock. Rather than feeling Argentinian in an American environment in the United States, Veronica now felt American in an Argentinian one in Buenos Aires. Some things were familiar, like the smells of fresh-baked bread in the streets or the diesel of passing buses, but other aspects were odd. The cars seemed smaller, homes lacked air conditioning, and the city was older than what she was used to seeing in Miami, which was a much younger city.

*Isabel Zuzek, Veronica, and her younger brother Patrick in his mother's arms at the Falls of Iguazú in Brazil, 1973.*

By the late 1980s, Andres Zuzek's career with Exxon put the family on its path to Houston. During the 1970s and 1980s, the prosperous economy drew many Latin American immigrants to the United States, with approximately 500,000 of those seeking work settling in Texas. For those tied to the oil industry, the 1979-80 oil embargo and Iran-Iraq War caused crude oil prices to soar 170 percent, reaching a peak of $35 ($150 today) per barrel in April of 1980. However, surplus oil and shifts in demand led to an oil bust in 1981 with prices declining rapidly for six years.[3] As a result, many workers, including Andres, lost their jobs.

Fortunately, the Sohio Oil Company hired Andres, prompting the family to move back to Richardson, after Veronica's sixth-grade year. For the next three years, Veronica attended several private schools in nearby Dallas until the family moved again, when Sohio and British Petroleum (BP) merged in 1986. The two companies had been partners since 1978, with Sohio tasked with finding new oil reserves and developing "BP's share of the Trans-Alaskan pipeline" as the company moved into the American market.[4] Once again, the oil industry became the "steering agent" of Veronica's life, reassigning her father to BP's Houston office.

Now fifteen, Veronica found Houston to be "welcoming and open." Houstonians' accepting nature made the city

*Veronica Fahys and her father Andres Zuzek wait at the Buenos Aires Airport as they travel to Rio de Janeiro on December 1, 1972. They relocated to Brazil for Andres's work as a geophysicist.*

*Three generations of the family reunited for a visit in Dallas in January of 1975, shortly after Veronica's younger sister, Sonia Zuzek, was born. Shown left to right: Veronica, Ivan Vinko Mele, Rozalija Mele, Sonia, and Patrick, with Isabel Zuzek standing behind them.*

distinct, and she found it easier to assimilate into society. Though Veronica loved Dallas, she found that Houston's character suited her well, noting that people "were from everywhere." As a sophomore at St. Agnes Academy, an all-girls Catholic high school, she found the environment "cosmopolitan and accepting." There, she made friends from around the world, including South America, the Caribbean, and India. Like many who found their way to Houston, Veronica developed an appreciation for her learning environment and an expanding worldview. "We all got along," she recalled, "it didn't matter [where people were from], and I loved that."

Veronica had similarly fond memories of her undergraduate career. In 1989, after being accepted to multiple colleges, she chose Houston's University of St. Thomas. Although her parents heavily influenced her decision to stay in Houston, Veronica nevertheless found the experience rewarding. A member of the Honors College majoring in international studies with a concentration in business, she made lifelong friends there and relished the city's robust diversity, tutoring immigrants at Houston's Catholic Charities.

*Veronica graduated from the University of St. Thomas in Houston in 1993. Two years later, she enrolled at Pace University School of Law in White Plains, New York.*

Veronica's interest in global politics, paired with her immigration experiences, sparked her desire to pursue a career in immigration law. Ready to leave Texas, Veronica applied to schools on the East Coast and chose Pace University's Elisabeth Haub School of Law, formerly Pace Law School, in White Plains, New York, where she enrolled in 1995. She took introductory courses in several legal fields, but they did not "click" with her. Immigration law, on the other hand, captivated her, given her personal history.

Not long after taking her first immigration law course during her second year, Veronica secured an internship

*Veronica and her four siblings stand in front of their home in Richardson, Texas, in 1985. Shortly after this photo was taken, the Zuzeks moved to Houston. Top row, left to right: Sonia, Patrick, and Veronica Zuzek; bottom row: Aleksej and Kristian.*

with immigration attorney Laura Jasinski in Stamford, Connecticut. Veronica's work at Jasinski Immigration Law confirmed her desire to practice immigration law, which was "in tune to [her] whole life experience." Jasinski exposed Veronica to a wide range of areas in the field, including asylum cases as well as business and family law. Even though these areas differ from Veronica's current legal practice, Veronica enjoyed working with Jasinski and felt she had gained crucial skills and a strong work ethic.

> ***"America is full of opportunity ... It is like no other country on Earth, and I think that the experience of the many has made us strong."***

Veronica indicated the most memorable aspect of her internship was helping immigrants achieve the American Dream. She views the American Dream as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for immigrants to access the best opportunities the United States has to offer and build a better life. The complexities of the U.S. immigration system influenced Veronica's desire to help immigrants feel the same sense of home that she felt. Ensuring a "nice legal process" for immigrants gratifies her and is the foundation of her current work at a time when immigration policy is in flux.

During law school, Veronica met and married Jeff Fahys, also a practicing attorney. When Veronica graduated from Pace in 1998, Laura Jasinski offered her a full-time job. However, within two years, Veronica had her two eldest children, Lauren and Emma Fahys, and found it difficult to work full-time. Consequently, she took a break from practicing law, and the Fahys family moved back to Houston where they welcomed a third child, Justin, in 2003. When Veronica had first moved to New York, she believed she had experienced

*Veronica and her Pace University School of Law classmates attend the 1997 Dean's Dinner, which fostered connections to the law school community. Pictured from left to right: Anne McBain, Dyan Barile, Darci Bailey, Veronica Zuzek, Dean Ottinger, and his wife.*

everything Houston had to offer. After returning, however, she stayed and called Houston her true home.

Veronica spent the next ten years caring for her children, instilling in them the Slovenian customs she was raised with. Although her children do not speak Slovenian, she raised them with both Slovenian and South American traditions. One tradition is spending hours together making *potica,* a Slovenian sweet bread with walnuts, chocolate, and honey. During the high holidays, Veronica's mother, Isabel, initiated the breadmaking process, and it became a tradition that brought the family closer during the holidays. Veronica's family also hosts weekend *asados,* or large barbecues with friends and family, a custom she remembered from Miami.

Veronica's focus on being a stay-at-home mom changed when she met Rinku Ray, her current law partner, at a Parent-Teacher Organization meeting at their children's schools. When Veronica discovered they both practiced immigration law, she felt the desire to re-enter the workforce after a ten-year hiatus. Restarting her career would have been difficult without support from Ray, who had practiced continuously in a niche area of immigration law called extraordinary ability. Proving extraordinary ability status for immigrants requires that they be recognized in their field, whether it be scientific, business-related, or artistic, and that their future endeavors will substantially benefit the United States.[5]

Helping people with extraordinary ability self-petition for green cards was unfamiliar to Veronica, so she was initially hesitant

*Potica, a traditional Slovenian bread made with walnuts and sweet fillings, remains a family holiday favorite.*


*Rinku Ray, left, and Veronica Fahys, right, represent their firm, Ray & Fahys, PLLC, which sponsored a raffle at the first annual Sugar Shindig in 2015. The event raised $18,600 for Fort Bend ISD teachers and schools.* Photo courtesy of Rinku Ray.

to build a whole practice on such a limited area of immigration law. It did not take long to change that opinion, noting with enthusiasm that this specialty is "probably the most fun area of law to practice in immigration …You get to meet very interesting, accomplished people who are doing incredible things for the United States." An instrumental part of her clients' immigration journey, Veronica felt she made a difference. As Veronica and Rinku built Ray & Fahys, PLLC in Sugar Land, a Houston suburb, Veronica found gratification with every client. She not only had a positive impact on their lives, she also helped them continue making a positive impact in the U.S. energy and business sectors.

Veronica prides herself on having helped many immigrants live comfortably in Houston and across the county. Using her immigration experience, she has helped strengthen Houston's immigrant community by giving them hope of achieving the American Dream. Through her many moves from Argentina to Brazil to numerous U.S. cities, Veronica developed resilience and adapted to the customs of her surroundings. These experiences expanded her worldview while keeping her closely connected with her Slovenian and South American roots. By representing immigrants, Veronica is carrying her legacy forward from one place to the next. HH

**Adithi Nythruva** is an undergraduate student at the University of Houston's Honors College, majoring in psychology and minoring in Creative Work and Leadership Studies. She plans to pursue graduate degrees in immigration law and American history.

# Before Patton Fought the Nazis, He Flanked Through Texas

*By Maj. Riley M. Kramer*

*Maj. Gen. George Patton during the second phase of the Louisiana Maneuvers in 1941.*
Photo courtesy of the US Army TRADOC.

Gen. George Patton, perhaps the most iconic American commander of the twentieth century, destroyed Nazi formations in North Africa, Sicily, and the Ardennes Forest. We all know this story; but before the fury of "Old Blood and Guts" was felt on World War II battlefields, he bolted through East Texas alongside his newly formed 2nd Armored Division, symbolizing the U.S. Army's modernizing force and Patton's surging leadership.

His dramatic dash through the Lone Star State reminds us of the crucial but forgotten peacetime training operations called the "Louisiana Maneuvers" of September 1941, only a few months before the nation entered the war after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The Texas-Louisiana borderlands represent a site of forgotten American military triumph of the Second World War. The fact that this triumph occurred before real bullets started flying toward American troops is precisely my point. Peacetime training is crucial, and the Louisiana Maneuvers serve as an excellent example of such preparation. Despite that, the massive mobilization efforts during World War II remain a footnote in the minds of many who celebrate Allied victories, such as the Normandy beach landings on D-Day and the freezing struggle of the Battle of the Bulge. But before boasting about the famous victories, we should understand how we got there.

## The World in September 1941

The Louisiana Maneuvers commenced two years after Germany's brazen invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, igniting the Second World War. While this alerted Americans to the threat of widespread war, Germany's swift victory over France in the summer of 1940 prompted the United States to actively prepare for war.[1] As European powers collapsed, Japan aggressively pursued control of the Pacific, directly threatening U.S. territories, bases, and allies.

By September 1941, much of Europe and North Africa were under Axis control. The Nazis seized Kyiv early that summer as part of its invasion of the Soviet Union. The world slowly came to realize the true nature of Hitler's aggression and the horrors that lay in his wake. As the U.S. Army concluded its Louisiana Maneuvers at the end of September, German forces executed over 33,000 Ukrainian Jews outside of Kyiv at a ravine called Babyn Yar on September 29 and 30. With Britain barely hanging on and the Soviet Union on the run, who was left to stop the barbaric destruction of civilization?

## The United States in September 1941

Between 1939 and 1940, the U.S. Army's size ranked eighteenth in the world, a far cry from what would be deployed between 1942 and 1945. On the same day as Germany's invasion of Poland, General George Marshall was sworn in

*Tanks from Patton's 2nd Armored Division cross the Sabine River on a pontoon bridge west of Converse, Louisiana.*

Photo courtesy of Rickey Robertson Collection.

as the U.S. Army chief of staff. Uniquely qualified to build a formidable military, Marshall recognized that war clouds were forming. He wrote to his friends the following day, "I do not anticipate peaceful years ahead."[2] Yet, the United States still resisted improving its defense posture.

In February 1940, Marshall warned Congress that if Europe "blazes in the late spring or summer, we must put our house in order before the sparks reach the Western Hemisphere." The fall of France and the attack on Britain in the summer of 1940 finally awakened the country, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt and General Marshall could then raise the army they needed. Roosevelt enacted the first peacetime draft in September 1940, dramatically increasing the size of the force.[3]

While the United States remained uncommitted to joining the war, large-scale training operations became feasible and prudent. In 1941, Marshall, a World War I veteran who understood the consequences of sending an unprepared army into combat, organized the largest military training exercises in U.S. history. Tennessee, Louisiana, and the Carolinas were selected as the primary sites for these massive training events, with the Louisiana Maneuvers becoming the most memorable.

Waiting for an attack on the country before preparing a modernized and well-trained force would have been a fatal mistake. The day before arriving in Louisiana to witness the massive training event, Marshall emphasized the historical significance of the milestone: "The present maneuvers are the closest peacetime approximation to actual fighting conditions that has ever been undertaken in this country … In the past we have jeopardized our future, penalized our leaders, and sacrificed our men by training untrained troops on the battlefield."[4]

The fight was on; even though it was simulated combat, the news that 94 soldiers died during the training event, mostly from vehicle accidents, brought a sobering reality to what the looming war might bring.[5]

## Phase I: Battle of the Red River

Twenty million acres of Texas and Louisiana land were acquired for the exercise, and the San Antonio-based Third Army helped secure permission for Texas properties. One Texan granted permission to use their land, stating, "You can dig it up or blow it up. I don't care. You have to have the land to do your job."[6] This response was reportedly typical of the many Texans who happily provided their land to help support their country's defense.

Although it was simulated combat, the Louisiana Maneuvers marked the largest military exercise in American history. The mock war featured nineteen full divisions and 400,000 soldiers. To fully appreciate its scale, consider that if it were conducted today, it would involve nearly the entire active-duty U.S. Army roster of approximately 460,000 troops.[7]

The opening phase of the Louisiana Maneuvers featured Lt. Gen. Ben Lear's smaller, tank-heavy Red Army attacking Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger's larger, less armored Blue Army. The implications for European warfare were clear, as smaller German Panzer divisions had frequently trounced larger defending forces. However, this battle occurred in the swamplands of East Texas and Louisiana, instead of the firm grounds of northern France. The maneuvers were staged as a realistic combat simulation, with no stoppages or days off, but also as an elaborate display for the American public showcasing the new army's readiness to defend the nation. As historians Debi and Irwin Unger put it, "Many of the foot soldiers on maneuvers slogging through the marshes and forests of Louisiana and East Texas, swatting mosquitoes and crushing ticks, were draftees getting their first taste of combat's rigors."[8]

George Patton and his tanks were assigned to Lear's Red Army, but this was not their battle to shine. The Red Army's inferior size needed to compensate with speed, flexibility, and shock, none of which were displayed in this fight. Lear was a skeptic of swift armored maneuvers, and as a result, Patton's tanks were trapped by swamplands, forcing them to move

*The Blue Army troops cross at Goodson Creek Bridge on what is now Louisiana Highway 118 as they advance toward Mount Carmel.*

Photo courtesy of the Rickey Robertson Collection.

along main paved roads. This situation ultimately made them vulnerable to the Blue Army's effective dive-bomb attacks.[9]

The Blue Army's 1st Cavalry Division, lurking across the Sabine River in East Texas, clinched the victory by fording an improvised ferry and boldly charging into Louisiana near Zwolle after dark. The charge from the storied Texas cavalrymen put Lear's Red Army on the ropes. One journalist compared it to the daring cavalry raids of the Civil War. Hours later, the Blue Army's bombers dropped propaganda leaflets that read, "Rout, disaster, hunger, sleepless nights in the forest and swamps are ahead of you – unless you surrender, surrender while there is still time."[10]

Patton's 2nd Armored Division was effectively destroyed in Phase I, bogged down by weather and terrain, and outmaneuvered by infantry and anti-tank units. Patton was disappointed at the battlefield loss and at the missed opportunity to capture his old friend, despite offering his troops a $50 reward to capture "a certain s.o.b. called Eisenhower," as historian Piers Brendon quoted him saying. Patton's tankers, eager to redeem themselves and show their tanks' true speed and power on a larger, more open battle space, lamented, "Wait 'til the next time."[11] The final phase of the event provided that open battle space, and Patton's tanks found their path to victory, moving towards Shreveport through East Texas.

## Phase II: Patton Storms Through Texas

For Phase II of the exercise, Patton's 2nd Armored Division was transferred to Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger's Blue Army in southern Louisiana, tasked with attacking Lt. Gen. Ben Lear's Red Army to the north. Lear's smaller force was now tasked with defending Shreveport. The smaller Red Army's mission was to hold off the Blue's attack led by Patton's tanks for as long as possible, with notional Red reinforcements en route.

Adverse weather presented an additional obstacle for Patton, as hurricane season peaked. A strong hurricane blasted Galveston and Houston just as the final battle began.

*A machine gun squad crosses the Sabine River by assault boat. The 1st Cavalry Division crossed the river and attacked Patton's troops at Zwolle, Louisiana.* Photo courtesy of the Rickey Robertson Collection.

*An antitank gun crew moves its 37mm gun after the Battle at Mount Carmel, east of the Sabine River, on September 17, 1941.*
Photo courtesy of the Rickey Robertson Collection.

Heavy winds and rain drenched the troops, but did not halt their movements. The storm strengthened as it neared the Gulf Coast, and the Army quickly moved hundreds of aircraft inland for shelter. An AP report from September 22, 1941, indicated, "Approximately 500,000 troops in western central Louisiana were in the area affected by the disturbance, but were believed in no danger unless the storm swings due north. Today the storm was 500 miles south of the troop concentration." Winds of 100 miles per hour hit the coast of Galveston before moving towards Houston, killing three in the area, and causing millions of dollars of damage to property and crop loss.[12]

The hurricane's residual impact benefited the defending Red Army, as the muddy terrain obstructed the Blue Army's swift and direct northbound advance. However, with the planning genius of Krueger's promising chief of staff, then Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the attacking Blue Army utterly confused the defending Red Army. Expecting a direct attack north through muddy Louisiana between the Red and Sabine Rivers, Lear's Red Army destroyed as many bridges as possible, hoping to slow the Blue armored advance towards Shreveport.

But Patton's armored force suddenly turned left and launched an epic mounted ride west into Texas, cutting almost 400 miles through the heart of East Texas in three days. Crossing the Louisiana-Texas state line over the Sabine River close to today's Interstate 10 near Orange, Texas, Patton's tanks bolted towards Beaumont before heading north. Covered by the 1st Cavalry Division, which was already moving through East Texas, Patton swung his tanks far from his supply lines, an immense risk for an armored unit that relied heavily on constant refuels.[13]

Patton did not neglect logistical constraints; he just redefined them. After years of mystery, it was revealed that Patton used his own cash to refuel his tanks at local Texas gas stations as he raced north. Storming through Beaumont, Patton then sprinted north through the Texas towns of

*Senior officers during the Louisiana Maneuvers, shown left to right: Mark Clark, chief of staff, Army Ground Forces; Harry J. Malony, chief of staff, Second Army; Dwight D. Eisenhower, chief of staff, Third Army; Ben Lear, commander Second Army; Walter Krueger, commander Third Army; Lesley J. McNair, commander Army Ground Forces.*

Photo courtesy of the US Army, Eisenhower Library, and Wikimedia Commons.

Woodville, Nacogdoches, and Henderson, before closing in on Shreveport to envelop the enemy.[14]

On September 27, the *Shreveport Journal* carried a dramatic report of the wargames from AP journalist Jerry Baulch, who was embedded with Lear's Red Second Army: "The more than 300 tanks of the second armored division swept from Texas in a wide arc that carried them completely out of the maneuver area to hit the Red stronghold [in Shreveport] from the rear."[15]

Baulch described how Patton's route through Texas forced him onto established roads, which risked his unit's capture and incentivized a swift run through East Texas: "To reach Shreveport, Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. sent his mechanized columns deep into Texas, but being out of the maneuver area, they were forced by rules to stick to roadways." Therefore, Gen. Lear's Red Army tried to capitalize on this "handicap faced by [Patton's] armored division attacking from Texas … and the tank-killers were sitting in wait at all possible approaches into Louisiana."[16]

Baulch captured the drama of Patton's plunge through Texas: "The troops set for a knockout blow to the second army all were on the Texas side of the treacherous Sabine River, an obstacle that apparently will take super military acumen to cross safely in an attack as closely watched as the third army's."[17]

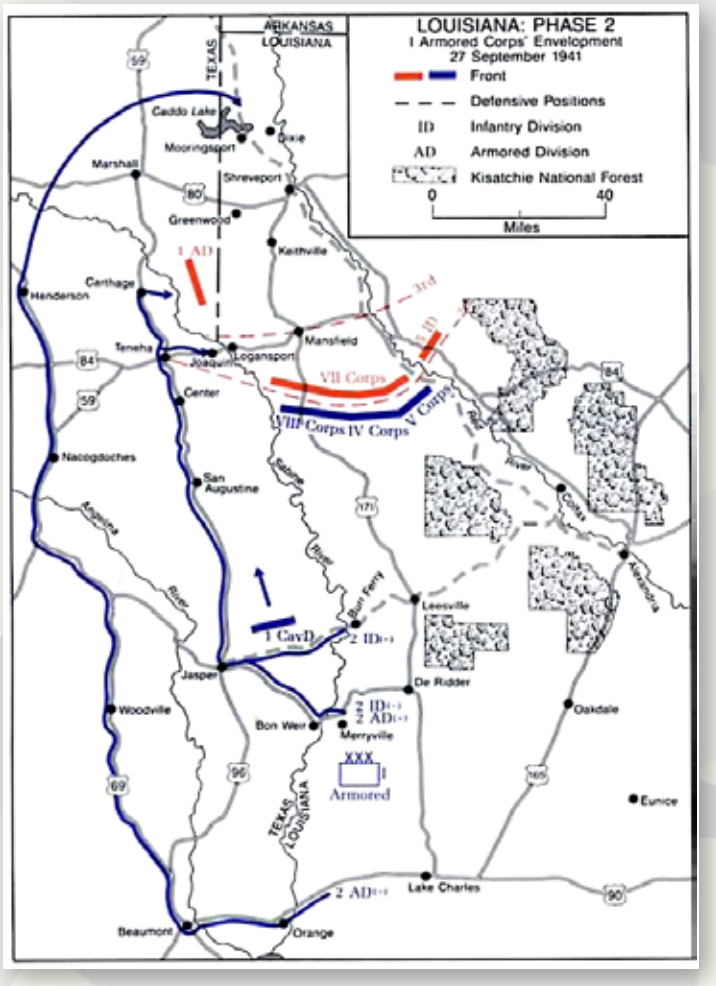
Even the defending Red Army crossed into Texas in search of Patton's tanks, deploying 15,000 troops into the small town of Center, Texas, hoping to cut off the attacking Blue forces from Patton's armored unit. The Red soldiers were camped around Center, watching "for a surprise movement by the mechanized units of the Blue forces supposed to be in Nacogdoches in considerable numbers." Red Army machine guns were emplaced at all four corners of the small Texas town, waiting for Patton to walk into the trap. Patton's tanks instead marched on towards Nacogdoches, and the Red Army came up empty. Baulch noted that "a number of Blue scouts were seen in Center, but none was captured."[18]

Patton's tanks advanced north of Shreveport before crossing back into Louisiana, surprising the Red Army during a nighttime raid in highly disciplined and dangerous blackout conditions. Patton and his troops seized the airport, water supply, and the surrounding area of the Red Army headquarters. This bold flank through Texas was described by one of Patton's officers, Captain Norris Perkins, as "the longest and most completely self-sustaining maneuver ever made by a large force in a short time."[19]

Lt. Gen. Lear protested Patton's unorthodox tactic, complaining that his Texas route lay outside of the legal Louisiana Maneuvers area. Patton responded, "I am unaware of the existence of any rules in war." More protests were lodged against Patton's alleged refueling methods at Texas gas stations. Patton seemed to relish the outrage over his clever tactics and responded that "the tanks are there; what are you going to do about it?"[20]

## Wargames Conclude, but War Looms

The Louisiana Maneuvers concluded on September 28, 1941, just before 5:00 p.m., with General Lesley McNair declaring an armistice. Patton's tanks had effectively encircled the Red Army headquarters at Shreveport, but the Blue




*The blue line at far-left traces Patton and the 2nd Armored Division's route to flank through Texas.*

Photo courtesy of the Center of Military History, U.S. Army.

Army's main force was still twenty-five miles away. The official tie disappointed the press and the soldiers, leading to great debate about which side actually won. With the massive wargames over, the South returned to normal. The next day, airlines resumed flights into Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Brownsville while local colleges, schools, and parishes reopened.[21]

The Louisiana Maneuvers became a hotbed for crucial military innovation and experimentation, as well as a media circus. The army sold the event as an attraction and a laboratory, with journalists nationwide covering the event with intense interest. Some experiments led to doctrinal changes and others did not, but all offered valuable information for the evolving force. Newly formed paratrooper units dropped into wargames for the first time, untested armored units learned the challenges of moving with a dismounted infantry element, and the Quartermaster Corps' armed laundry units debuted their efficient sustainment capabilities in the field. Testing new equipment and techniques became invaluable, but testing leadership and combat power topped the Louisiana Maneuvers' list of achievements. This is where George Patton made his mark.

Patton's ride through Texas proved thrilling for the many reporters covering the wargames, but his flank through Texas should do more than entertain us. It reminds us that peacetime training matters. This training may have been crucial to the American victory in World War II and certainly reduced battlefield losses.

Senior Army leaders, such as George Marshall, directly credited the Louisiana Maneuvers as being critical to victory in World War II. Years later, he stated that the rough realities of the wargames helped Eisenhower become an effective strategist and "is the reason that Patton and Hodges and Bradley were able to move as rapidly as they did across the face of Europe."[22]

**Tanks 'Capture' City Of Shreveport**

**Dramatic Coup Winds Up U. S. War Games**

*International News Service*

WITH THIRD ARMY IN NORTH LOUISIANA, Sept. 27.—Led by Major General George Patton, tanks of the Second Armored Division rumbled into Shreveport today in what appeared as the final act of the greatest war maneuvers ever staged by the Army.

The march on Shreveport came as one of the most dramatic moments of the entire maneuvers. While to the south and east other units of the Second and Third armies battled for possession of strategic hill positions, the tanks, half tracks and armored cars of Gen. Patton swung west over the Sabine River and

(Continued on Page 12, Col. 2)

*An excerpt from the September 27, 1941,* El Paso Herald-Post, *highlights how Patton's bold assault on Shreveport "appeared as the final act of the greatest war maneuvers ever staged by the Army."*

Image courtesy of Newspapers.com.

General Patton provided the most remarkable endorsement of the maneuvers in a letter to the *Shreveport Times*' editor Don Ewing on January 7, 1945, just weeks after his legendary Battle of the Bulge breakthrough in the Ardennes Forest.

*Generals Omar Bradley, Dwight Eisenhower, and George Patton, shown left to right, meet in Bastogne, Belgium, February 4, 1945, having forged their leadership skills in the Louisiana Maneuvers in 1941.*

Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Wikimedia Commons.

Eisenhower had called on Patton to rescue the surrounded 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne, given that Patton's aggressive instincts – showcased in the wargames years earlier – were world famous.

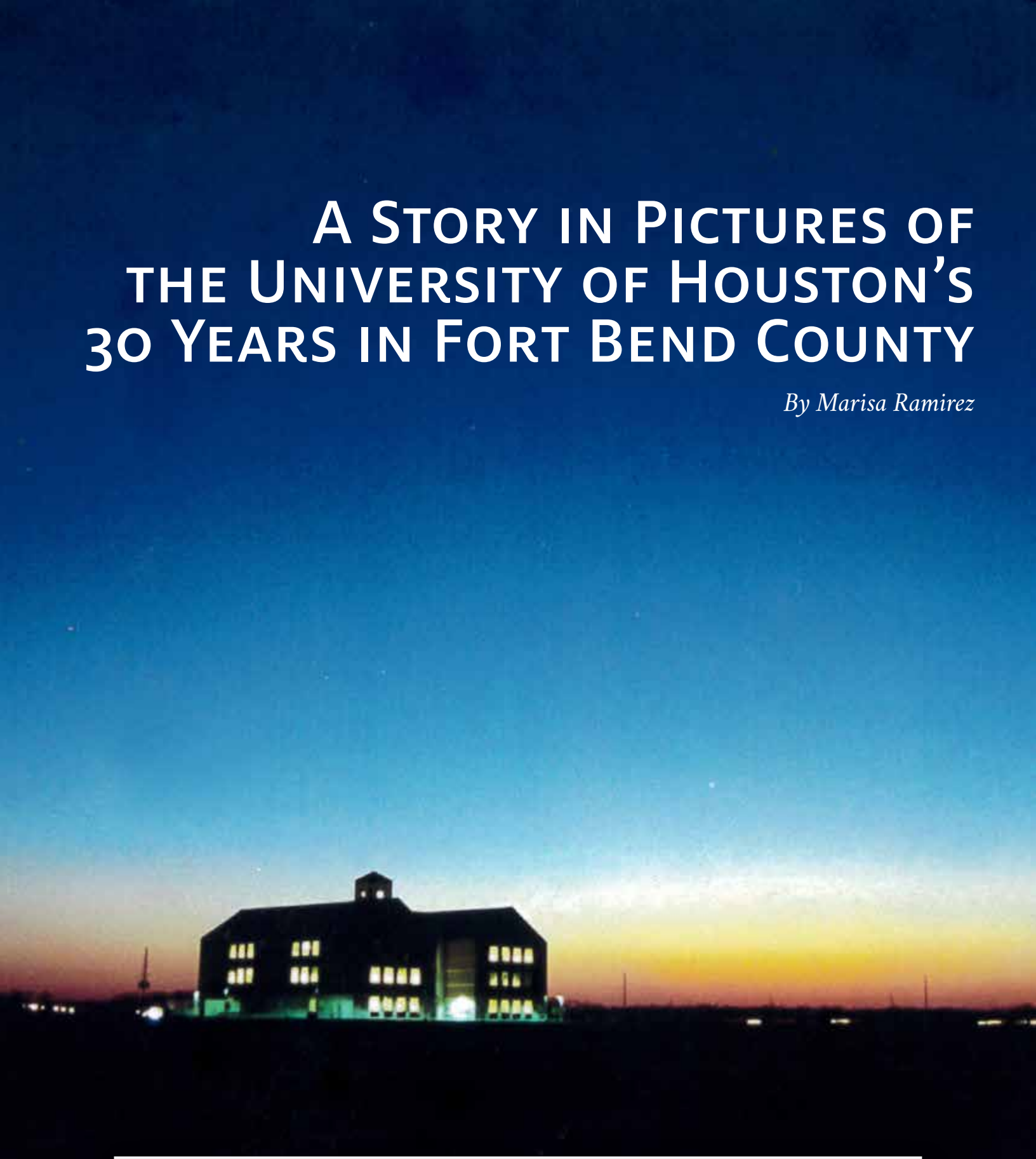
Patton's letter confirmed that his successful attack on the Nazis' southern front in Bastogne resembled the nighttime maneuvers in Shreveport. Patton had befriended Ewing as they traveled through East Texas during the wargames. In his letter from battered Bastogne, Patton informed Ewing that he had not forgotten his flank through Texas and his several training raids in blackout conditions: "I recall very well our trip through the night; and I can assure you that our success, particularly in this present operation, has been due to the ability of our people to move rapidly at night."[23]

Military readiness can easily be overlooked during peacetime. However, Patton's forgotten ride through Texas in 1941 reminds us that peacetime preparations are crucial for winning uncertain future conflicts. HH

**Riley M. Kramer** is a major in the U.S. Army. He earned an M.A. in U.S. History from the University of Houston, where he is now a Ph.D. candidate in U.S. History. He teaches officership in the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The views expressed in this piece are the author's alone, and do not reflect official positions of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.

# A Story in Pictures of the University of Houston's 30 Years in Fort Bend County

*By Marisa Ramirez*



*The story of the University of Houston (UH) at Sugar Land has two parts: its history as a University of Houston System (UHS) campus and its history as a University of Houston instructional site. Woven through its history, like the winding Brazos River, are partnerships with other higher education entities, city and county officials, as well as foundations, donors, and other supporters.*

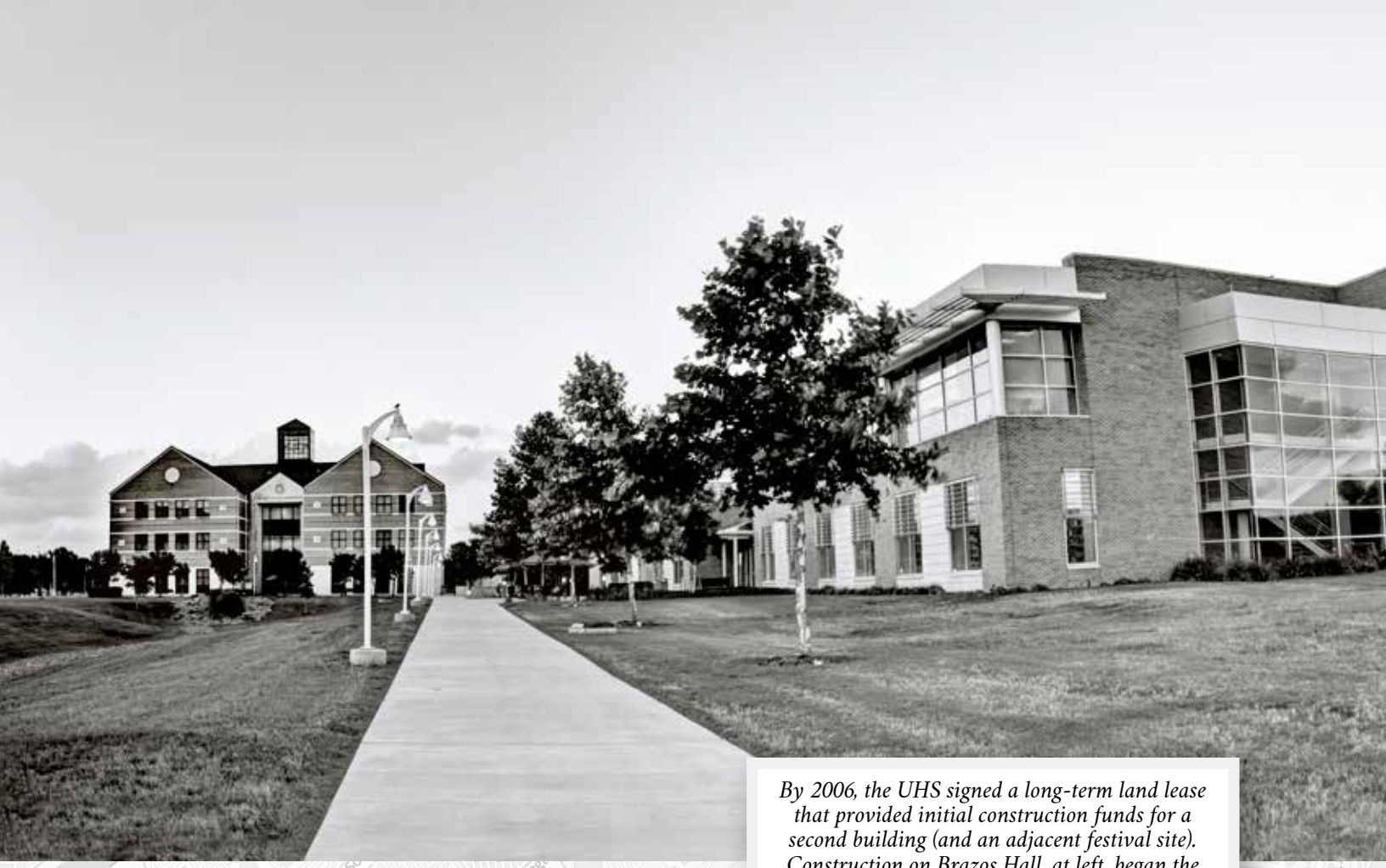
*"Like everything we do, it starts with community – what does it need, what can we do and how can we be part of each other's success," said Jay Neal, associate vice president of academic affairs and chief operating officer since 2017.*


*UH expanded to Fort Bend County, which lacked a four-year university, when UH-Victoria (UHV) began offering classes in Sugar Land at the CentraPlex on Julie Rivers Road in 1994. By the next year, as enrollment grew, then-UH Systems (UHS) Chancellor William P. Hobby recognized a need to expand higher ed opportunities. All UHS institutions began offering classes at the CentraPlex, nearby Clements High School, and Wharton County Junior College.*

*In 1996, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved a partnership with Wharton County Junior College, Houston Community College, and the UH System to build a higher education presence in Fort Bend County. By 1998, the halls were bursting at the seams. The Texas Department of Transportation transferred nearly 250 acres of land near the Brazos River for construction of a permanent facility.*

**Marisa Ramirez** is the senior director of University Communication at UH Sugar Land campus.


*Later in 1998, the City of Sugar Land and The George Foundation joined a construction campaign started by UHS Board of Regents with approval for an $11 million building. That effort led to the opening of The Albert & Mamie George Building in 2002.*



*By 2006, the UHS signed a long-term land lease that provided initial construction funds for a second building (and an adjacent festival site). Construction on Brazos Hall, at left, began the following year and it opened in 2008.*

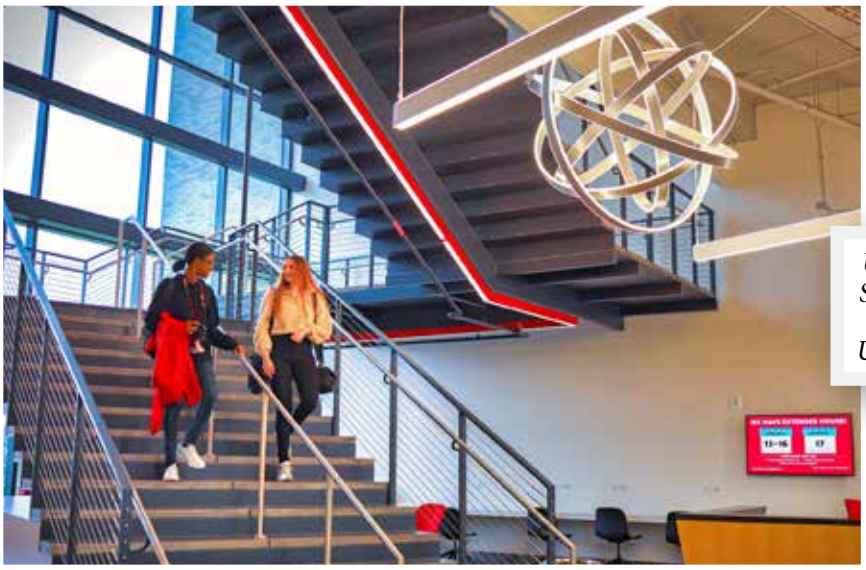
*In 2011, an innovated three-way partnership with Fort Bend County, Wharton County Junior College, and the University of Houston led to the construction and opening of the University Branch Library, open to students, faculty, staff, and the community.*

UH SYSTEM SUGAR LAND

*The University of Houston System at Sugar Land was officially renamed University of Houston Sugar Land in 2012 to reflect its connection to the UH main campus.*

*The UH College of Technology's Digital Media Program moved to the University of Houston Sugar Land in 2014.*

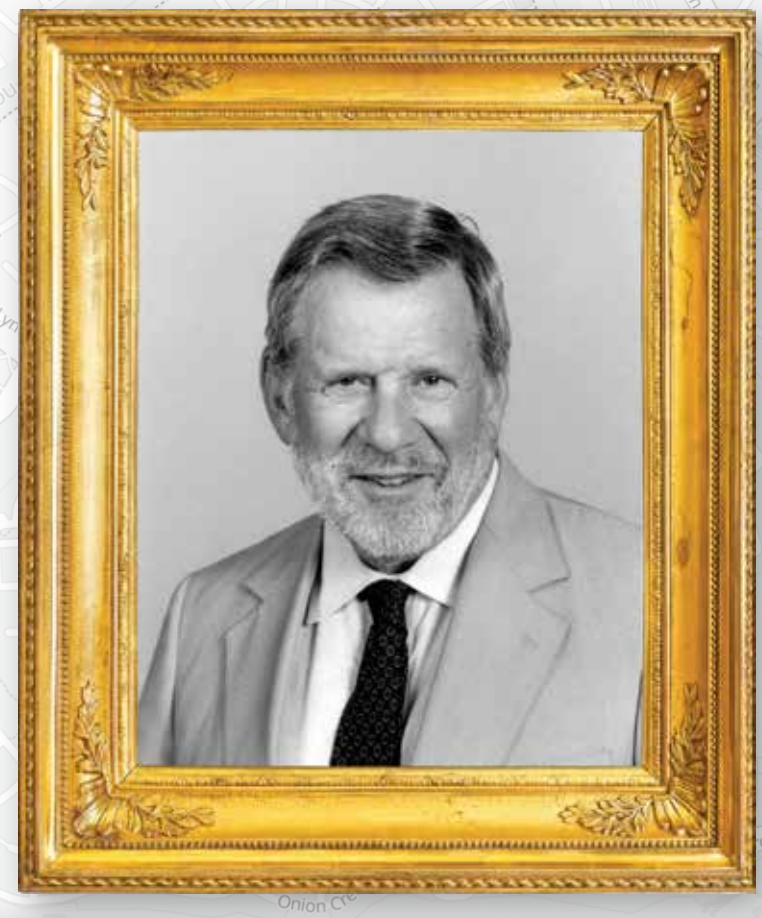
*In 2015, the School of Nursing became a program of the University of Houston. The Texas Board of Nurse Examiners had previously approved a bachelor of science in Nursing to be offered at the UHS at Sugar Land in 2006 and administered by UHV's School of Nursing.*



*UH Sugar Land broke ground for the new Sugar Land Academic Building in 2018. It opened the following year and housed the UH technology classes, labs, and programs.*

*In 2016, the UHS Board of Regents approved a master plan for the University of Houston Sugar Land that included construction of a new building.*

*In 2023, UH Sugar Land broke ground for its second Sugar Land Academic Building to house engineering and technology programs. The grand opening was held in fall 2025.*



*"As of this moment, the future of higher education in Fort Bend County has just gotten brighter."*

*—William P. Hobby Jr., Former Texas Lieutenant Governor and Former UH System Chancellor.*

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR – What are your roots?

*Debbie Z. Harwell, Editor.*

I am descended from immigrants, and most likely, so are you unless you have indigenous roots.

On my maternal side, I am a sixth-generation American. My great-great-great-great-grandparents, mostly of English and Irish descent, arrived in the colonial period. They settled in Virginia and relocated to Georgia before eventually staying in Texas. My ancestors included people who fought in the Revolutionary War as well as for the Confederacy, and multiple Methodist ministers named for John Wesley.

My paternal grandparents left their home in Slovenia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and traveled to Havre, where they boarded the *Provance* to New York in 1912. They settled in a Slovenian community in Pittsburgh, and although Eastern Europeans received criticism for taking Americans' jobs, my grandfather found work with the Pennsylvania Railroad. My father was born in Pittsburgh and served in World War II. The only one of the Zerjav children to leave home after the war, he married my mother and they opened a record shop in Houston.

Immigration is a hot topic these days – hot, as in top of mind; and hot, as in it gets people's blood boiling. And why is that, when all of us except those with indigenous roots are descendants of immigrants? How many generations back do you have to go to be a legitimate American citizen? How many years in residency is long enough that you can feel safe that you will not be deported or refused reentry if you visit your family outside the United States?

Immigrants frequently get blamed for being a drain on the economy and stealing "our" jobs, but the statistics in our region paint a different picture, as reported in the 2025 Houston Area Survey by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University. People in the metropolitan area have increasingly embraced its heterogeneity and seen immigrants as assets. When residents of Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties were asked this year if they thought immigrants contribute more to the economy than they take, 71 percent agreed. When asked about undocumented residents specifically, the overall positive response remained high at 61 percent. Further, the Houston Area Survey noted "72 percent rejected the idea that the Houston area would be better off if all undocumented immigrants were deported." Another 2025 Kinder survey found 70 percent of respondents wanted the government to offer pathways to citizenship.

Houstonians have good reason to feel this way. A 2024 report by the American Immigration Council, found the 1.7 million immigrants in the region earned $66.5 billion in 2021 and contributed $11.1 billion in federal taxes and $5.2 billion to state and local taxes. Their spending power represented $50.2 billion or 26.7 percent of the Houston economy. The Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice in *Undocumented Immigrants in Texas* found undocumented individuals contributed $2.4 billion to Texas through sales tax, school property taxes, utilities, and the lottery in 2018; they cost the state $2 billion in services, leaving a net gain to the state of $420.9 million.

Immigrants in Houston tend to occupy jobs in construction, agriculture, services, manufacturing, and hospitality, often doing difficult, dirty, and dangerous physical labor. Beyond that, they also make up 41.9 percent of all entrepreneurs in the area, producing $4.4 billion in revenue. The reality is that the loss of immigrants could be devastating to our economy, but it goes beyond dollars. Stories abound of immigrants who have improved the lives of others by sharing their culture or taking action in emergencies, for example.

The articles in this magazine look at three community institutions – the Houston Saengerbund, Old Chinatown, and the Frida Festival – to show the positive impact ethnic cultural and economic institutions have had from the 1880s to today. It examines the personal stories of Ana Eigler, a Latinx Sephardic Jewish woman and social worker; Dima Suki, a professor at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and member of the Lebanese community; Lizbeth Oritz, a Mexican American artist and founder of the Frida Festival; and Veronica Fahys, a Slovenian Argentinian American immigration attorney. Some of these women came to Houston on their own, while others came with their spouse or parents. All the stories focus on people who arrived with hopes for a better life and contributed to making Houston a welcoming, thriving, and empathetic community.

Houston has historically been a magnet for immigrants seeking jobs. It has welcomed immigrants who made the city's growth possible and benefited from what they had to offer at all points on the spectrum, economically and culturally. Thus, it is no wonder Houston has earned the designation as a place "where the local is global."

At the Center for Public History, we train students to research and preserve the stories of Houston's past because we believe history matters in our community, and everyone's stories deserve to be told. HH

## Announcements

To commemorate its 2023 centennial, the **Harris County Historical Society** established and endowed the Harris County Historical Society Award of Excellence at the University of Houston Center for Public History that is presented to a student for excellence in public history work related to Houston or Harris County history. This year two recipients received the award. The Center for Public History greatly appreciates this support for student success.

*Ashley Gonzalez created a documentary film,* Adaptive Reuse in Houston: Breathing New Life into Historic Spaces*, focused on two downtown historic spaces: the Cistern and The Post, which have found new purpose through sustainable architecture practices.*

*Miranda Ruzinsky worked with Alexander Kelly to create an exhibit at the Houston American Red Cross.* The Legacy Exhibit *uses artifacts to tell the story of the organization from its founding to the services provided by its various branches today*

## *Thank You!*

The Sprit of Houston shown at the 1977 National Women's Conference was reborn in August thanks to the conversation led by moderator Joy Sewing with panelists Poppy Northcutt, Linda Garcia-Merchant, Josephine Lee, and Caitlyn Jones at the *Houston History* launch. These amazing women enlightened the audience, bringing their perspectives on the conference's historical significance and women's activism today. Many women in the audience were part of the conference and shared their experiences as well. We want to thank the panelists, The Heritage Society for hosting the event, and UH Special Collections for bringing the pop-up exhibit of conference artifacts.


*Panelists, left to right, Poppy Northcut, Josephine Lee, Linda Garcia-Merchant, Caitlyn Jones, and Joy Sewing, and the audience are welcomed by The Heritage Society's executive director Alison Bell.*

*Polina Kharmats, graduate assistant in UH Special Collections, created a pop-up exhibit of NWC artifacts to share with visitors.*

# ENDNOTES

## The Houston Saengerbund: "One of the Best Kept Secrets in the City of Houston

1 "Willkommen | Welcome," The Houston Saengerbund, **www.houstonsaengerbund.org/**. The quotation in the title is from honorary member Burl Holloway.
2 Jason W Barrett, Douglas K Boyd, and Louis F Aulbach, "Seeing Houston From the Bottom Up: Using Archaeology and Archives to Reconstruct a Forgotten Houston Neighborhood," *Houston History* 15, no. 3, fall 2017; Theodore G Gish, "The History of The Houston Sängerbund," Introduction, A Publication of the Institute of the Texas-German Studies and The University of Houston, 1990, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
3 Gish, 9-10.
4 Rodney Thorin, interview by Jonas L. Kaupert, November 1, 2021, pending deposit, UH-Oral History of Houston, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries; "History," The Houston Saengerbund, **www.houstonsaengerbund.org/site/about/history/.**
5 Gish, 14-15.
6 Gish, 16, 17, 19.
7 "Gedenkblatt zum 25-jährigen Jubiläum," 1920, box 1, folder 2, 1, Houston Saengerbund Records, 1874-1985, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries; Thorin, interview.
8 Gish, 31.
9 Gish, 31.
10 Thorin, interview.
11 Gish, 33-34.
12 Gish, 35, 37.
13 Gish, 38; "History," Houston Saengerbund.
14 Gish, 38-39.
15 Gish, 40-41.
16 Gish, 19, 41-42.
17 "Rehearsals," The Houston Saengerbund, **www.houstonsaengerbund.org/.**
18 "History," Houston Saengerbund; The Houston Saengerbund Saengerhalle Facebook Group.
19 Thorin, interview.
20 Thorin, interview.
21 Thorin, interview.
22 Thorin, interview.

## The Houston Saengerbund: A Legacy of German Culture and Song

1 Theodore G. Gish, "The History of The Houston Sängerbund," Introduction, A Publication of the Institute of the Texas-German Studies and The University of Houston, 1990, Houston Saengerbund Records, box 2, folder 32, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
2 Freddy Hagenburger Membership Card, 1952, Saengerbund Records, box 2, folder 29.
3 Ladies Auxiliary Bylaws, 1980, Saengerbund Records, box 3, folder 1.
4 Songbook, 1902, Saengerbund Records, box 9, folder 26.
5 Records Ledger, Saengerbund Records, box 10, folder 16.

## Relocation, not Dislocation: Organizational Continuity across Houston's Chinatowns

1 Edward C. M. Chen and Debbie Z. Harwell, "Asian Americans: Expanding Our Horizons," *Houston History* 13, no. 1, Fall 2016, 13; Sebastian Herrera, "'Katy Asian Town' Being Developed in East Katy," Chron., July 2017, **www.chron.com/neighborhood/katy/news/article/Katy-Asian-Town-being-developed-in-east-Katy-11263767.php**.
2 Edward J. M. Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (1977): 2-6; Yali Zou, "Chapter 4: The Development of the Original Houston Chinatown," in *The Significance of Chinatown Development to a Multicultural America: An Exploration of the Houston Chinatowns*, by Zen Tong Chunhua Zheng (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2024), 39.
3 Zou, 39; Brian Swanland, "Chinese Ethnicity in the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area" (Ph.D. dissertation, Austin, University of Texas at Austin, 1995), 44-48.
4 Zou, 41-45.
5 "Vote for Convention Center Proposition A," *Southwest Chinese Journal* 8, no. 11 (November 1983): 1, 3; Anthony Knapp and Igor Vojnovic, "Rethinking the Growth Machine: How to Erase a Chinatown from the Urban Core," *Urban Geography* 34, no. 1 (2013): 66-67; Yi-Chin Lee and Sam Gonzalez Kelly, "Houston's First Chinatown to Disappear If I-45 Project Moves Forward," *Houston Chronicle*, August 4, 2022.
6 Anthony Knapp & Igor Vojnovic, "Ethnicity in an Immigrant Gateway City: The Asian Condition in Houston," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 38, no. 3 (2016): 354; Swanland, 65-67; Dan Q. Dao, "How Houston's Asiatown Made Its Great '90s Westward Migration," *Chron*, October 6, 2022, **www.chron.com/culture/article/chinatown-houston-history-17489453.php**; Gordan Quan, "Oral History Interview with Gordan Quan," by Dr. Melody Yunzi Li, Arshiya Yasin, Charis Wu, and Daniel Killian, in Quan Law Group, PLLC Offices, February 2025, 08:27-11:05. The oral history is slated to be launched in August 2025 alongside a "Mapping Houston's Old Chinatown" website.
7 Sebastian Herrera, "'Katy Asian Town' Being Developed in East Katy," *Chron.*, July 2017, **www.chron.com/neighborhood/katy/news/article/Katy-Asian-Town-being-developed-in-east-Katy-11263767.php**; Roy Vu, "From the Ashes of the Cold War: Constructing a Southern Vietnamese Community and Identity in Houston," *The Houston Review of History and Culture* 3, no. 1, fall 2005, 27, 29; Erica Cheng, "For Mai's Restaurant, fast-changing Houston could mean tough decisions," *Chron*, March 2024, **www.chron.com/food/article/mais-restaurant-vietnamese-houston-oldest-19250617.php**.
8 Quan, interview with Li, et al, 16:03-16:58.
9 Kyle McClenagan, "Houston restaurant Kim Son will be forced to close flagship location due to I-45 expansion," Houston Public Media, January 2025, **www.houstonpublicmedia.org**.
10 Quan, interview with Li et al, 08:27-11:05.
11 Quan, interview with Li et al, 08:27-11:05; Edward C. M. Chen, "An American Chinese in Houston," *Houston History* 13, no. 1, October 2015,7-11, 13; Edward K. T. Chen, quoted in "The History of the Chinese in Houston," from A Short History of the Chinese in America, **cacatutorialserieshistory.weebly.com/caca---houston-lodge.html**.
12 "The CACA Annual Miss Chinatown Pageant and Picnic," *The Southwest Chinese Journal* 1, no. 1 (September 1976): 10; June Dove Leong, "Virginia Chang New Miss Chinatown Houston," *The Southwest Chinese Journal* 7, no. 14 (August 1982): 1; "Scholarship Prizes," Miss Chinatown Houston Scholarship Pageant, 2025, **www.misschinatownhouston.org/scholarship-prizes**.
13 Elizabeth Lee, "The Story of Chinese Americans who call Texas Home," *Voice of America*, March 13, 2025, **www.voanews.com/a/the-story-of-chinese-americans-who-call-texas-home/8008697.html**; Anne S. Chao and Chris Chan, "The Gees of Houston: Networking for Strength and Survival," *Transnational Asia* 3, no. 1 (September 16, 2019): 24-26.
14 Linda Wu and Jane Gee, oral history interview transcript, by Anne Chao, in Jane Gee's home, October 2012, 17.
15 Zou, 41-42; Chao and Chan, 21-24.
16 Zou, 41-42.
17 Chao and Chan, 6-11.
18 Chao and Chan, 6-11.
19 Harry Gee Jr., "Harry Gee Jr. oral history interview," by Maddy Bullard & Dae Shin Ju, Houston Asian American Archives oral history interviews, MS 573 (2012), **digitalcollections.rice.edu/documents/detail/harry-gee-jr.-oral-history-interview/333149**, 0:34:57-0:41:41, 1:40:24-1:44:36.
20 Zou, 45.
21 Quan, interview with Li et al, 12:31-14:04.
22 Zou, 42, 56; Chao and Chan, 22-23.
23 Kirkland An and Megan Fan Munce, "Census Data Shows How Houston's Asian Community Has Exploded in Growth and Diversity since 1869," *Houston Chronicle*, May 2023.

## Between Two Worlds: Ana Eigler's Journey of Bicultural Belonging

1 Menachem Posner, "Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews - The History of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," Chabad.org, **www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4095674/jewish/Ashkenazi-and-Sephardic-Jews.htm**.
2 *History of Safed Self Guided Tour*, video, 2018, **www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvJd75utdfs**; "History of Safed," Safed Israel, **www.safed-home.com/historyofsafed.html**; "Tiberias," Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of AICE, **www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tiberias**.
3 Ana Eigler, interview by Rougeaux Lynnex, transcribed by Suzanne Mascola, April 7, 2022, The Sephardic Latinx Oral History Project, Holocaust Museum Houston, 1, **https://hmh.org/education/sephardic-latinx-oral-history-project/.**
4 Eigler, interview, 2.
5 Eigler, interview, 2, 11; Rabbi Pinchos Fried, "The Role of Women in Judaism," TorahMates (blog), January 1, 2023, **www.torahmates.org/jewish-resources/the-role-of-women-in-judaism/.**
6 Eigler, interview, 7, 9.
7 Eigler, interview, 5.
8 Eigler, interview, 6. Due to varying standards and curricula it is not uncommon for US universities to decline recognition of degrees earned outside the United Staes.
9 Eigler, interview, 13 ,7, 14.
10 Eigler, interview, 13, 7, 14.
11 Eigler, interview, 13.
12 Eigler, interview, 10, 16.
13 Eigler, interview, 10, 16.
14 Eigler, interview, 20.
15 Eigler, interview, 21.

## Storyteller of Today: Dima Suki's Journey from Lebanon to America

1 Michael Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities: Between Cities, Nations and Trans-Nations," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2004): 35; Dima Suki, interview by Maya Bouchebl, March 15, 2025, pending deposit, UH-Oral History of Houston, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
2 To read the full lyrics, see gbasfora, "Fairouz: Khedni ezra3ni biard Lebnan," AllTheLyrics, July 8, 2014, **www.allthelyrics.com/forum/showthread.php?t=151741**.
3 Suki, interview, 3.
4 Suki, interview, 3.
5 Suki, interview, 11.
6 Suki interview, 13.
7 Suki, interview, 16.
8 James Patrick McGuire, "Lebanese Syrians," *The New Handbook of Texas* (Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 135.

9 Akram Khater, "The Early Lebanese in America: A Demographic Portrait, 1880-1930," Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies, November 8, 2018, **https://lebanesestudies.ncsu.edu/news/2018/11/08/the-early-lebanese-in-america-a-demographic-portrait-1880-1930/**; University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, *The Syrian and Lebanese Texans* (San Antonio: University of Texas at San Antonio, Institute of Texan Cultures, 1974), 4.

10 Biographical Overview | Michael E. DeBakey," National Library of Science Profiles in Science, https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/spotlight/fj/feature/biographical.

11 Jamail's Grocery Store," The Official Houston Preppy Handbook, February 8, 2019, https://theofficialhoustonpreppyhandbook.wordpress.com/2019/02/08/jamails-grocery-store/; Tracy Lewis, "They're Minding the Store," Texas Monthly, December 1977; "The Syrian and Lebanese Texans," 4; Rebecca Treon, "The Unexpected Origins of Houston's Favourite Po'boy," March 2025, BBC, www.bbc.com/travel/article/20250321-the-unexpected-origins-of-houstons-favourite-po-boy.

12 Sari Gholmiah, personal communication with author, April 20, 2025.

## Lizbeth Ortiz: Art in Action

1 Lizbeth Ortiz, interview by Melissa Hernandez, November 3, 2023, pending deposit, UH-Oral History of Houston Project, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

2 Thomas McWhorter, "From Das Zweiter to El Segundo, A Brief History of Houston's Second Ward," *Houston History* 8, no. 1, Fall 2010.

3 "East End Neighborhood in Houston, Texas, 77003, 77011, 77020, 77023, 77029 detailed profile," City-Data, **www.city-data.com/neighborhood/East-End-Houston-TX.html#google_vignette**.

4 Ortiz, interview

5 Ortiz, interview.

6 Ortiz, interview.

7 Ortiz, interview.

8 Ortiz, interview.

9 Joy Sewing, "Sewing: Festival celebrates 'universal language' of Frida Kahlo's art and life," *Houston Chronicle*, April 24, 2023; "Viva Frida," Frida Festival, **www.fridafestival.org/past-frida-festivals/19th-annual-frida-festival-2024/**.

10 Ortiz, interview.

11 Ortiz, interview.

12 "The Latin Recording Academy Selects Lizbeth Ortiz Art for Grammys," Entertainment Close-up, *Gale Business: Insights*, September 14, 2008, **https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/apps/doc/A185046241/GBIB?u=txshracd2588&sid=bookmark-GBIB&xid=6af9879c**.

13 "Local Visual Artist Snags Latin Grammy Title," *Houston Press*, October 7, 2008, **www.houstonpress.com/news/local-visual-artist-snags-latin-grammy-title-6749711**.

14 "Local Visual Artist Snags Latin Grammy Title."

15 "The Latin Recording Academy Selects Lizbeth Ortiz Art."

16 Abel Ortiz, "Healing Uvalde: Community Healing and Resilience," National Museum of the American Latino, **https://latino.si.edu/exhibitions/healing-uvalde**.

17 Elizbeth Ortiz, "New mural added to 'Healing Uvalde 21 Portrait Murals' project," KSAT 12, October 2, 2022, video, 0:40, **www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3nGPub9F9A**.

18 Abel Ortiz, "How a Group of Texas Artists Came Together to Honor Uvalde's Lost Kids," *Frontline* PBS, July 24, 2023, video, 2:20, **www.youtube.com/watch?v=12rUsvSOUe8**.

## From One Place to the Next: The Story of Veronica Fahys

1 Veronica Fahys, interview by Adithi Nythruva, October 8, 2024, pending deposit, UH-Oral History of Houston, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries (Further references to Veronica's interview are from this citation); David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martín, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 301.

2 Ran Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, 2017, **https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants**.

3 Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, "Origins of the New Latino Underclass," *Race and Social Problems Journal 4* (2012): 5-17; "The Changing Characteristics of Recent Immigrant Arrivals Since 1970," Pew Research Center, 2015, **www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2015/09/28/chapter-3-the-changing-characteristics-of-recent-immigrant-arrivals-since-1970/**; Anja Ristanovic, "Major Oil Market Crashes in History," Oil and Energy Online, 2025, **https://oilandenergyonline.com/articles/all/major-oil-market-crashes-history/**; Daniel Yergin, "The Energy Outlook; Lulled to Sleep by the Oil Glut Mirage," *New York Times*, June 28, 1981, sec. 3, p. 2.

4 Kerry Cooper and R. Malcolm Richards, "Investing the Alaskan Project Cash Flows: The Sohio Experience," *Financial Management* 17, no. 2 (1988): 58-61; William D. Smith, "Sohio Merger Set with BP Pil Corp.," *New York Times*, June 3, 1969, 61.

5 "Employment-Based Immigration: First Preference EB1," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, **www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/permanent-workers/employment-based-immigration-first-preference-eb-1**.

## Before Patton Fought the Nazis, He Flanked Through Texas

1 Robert Citino, "The Louisiana Maneuvers," The National World War II Museum, July 11, 2017, **www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/louisiana-maneuvers**.

2 Nancy Beck Young, *Why We Fight: Congress and the Politics of World War II* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 23; Debi and Irwin Unger, with Stanley Hirshon, *George Marshall: A Biography* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), 88.

3 Unger and Unger, 91; Paul Dickson, *The Rise of the G.I. Army 1940-1941: The Forgotten Story of How America Forged a Powerful Army Before Pearl Harbor* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020), 94.

4 Dickson, 220-221.

5 Dickson, 233.

6 Dickson, 196.

7 Dickson, 190; U.S. Department of Defense, "2022 Demographics Profile: Army Active-Duty Members," Military OneSource, **https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Infographic/2022-demographics-active-duty-army-members.pdf**.

8 Unger and Unger, 107.

9 Dickson, 223.

10 Christopher Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941*, Commemorative ed. (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1991), **www.google.com/books/edition/The_U_S_Army_GHQ_Maneuvers_of_1941/62vbAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1, 84; Dickson**, 222.

11 Dickson, 224; Piers Brendon, *Ike: His Life and Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 74; Donald Houston, *Hell on Wheels: The 2d Armored Division* (San Rafeal, California: Presidio Press, 1977), 85.

12 Gabel, 100; Associated Press, "Gulf Storm Is Headed For Texas," *The Evening Independent*, September 22, 1941, **https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=aqkLAAAAIBAJ&sjid=KVUDAAAAIBAJ&pg=3460,5129833; Sumner, 264-266**.

13 Citino; Gabel, 103.

14 Dickson, 231; Citino; Gabel, 103-105.

15 Jerry Baulch, "Lear's Army Halts Attack From Rear," *The Shreveport Journal*, September 27, 1941.

16 Baulch.

17 Baulch.

18 Baulch.

19 Dickson, 231.

20 Citino; Don Ewing, "Night March in Louisiana Beat Germans at the Bulge," *The Shreveport Times*, March, 2, 1945.

21 Dickson, 232-233.

22 Forrest Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope, 1939-1942* (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), 89.

23 Dickson, 325; Ewing.

0073044200
University of Houston
Center for Public History
3623 Cullen Blvd., Room 521
Houston, TX 77204-3007

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
**PAID**
HOUSTON, TX
PERMIT NO. 5910

0 94922 72779 4 01


Thank you to the

SUMMERLEE

FOUNDATION

for supporting our students
and magazine production

Center for Public History

College of Liberal Arts
and Social Sciences