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Jack Yates High School at 100



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Celebrating the Yates High School Centennial

By Debbie Z. Harwell



Debbie Z. Harwell, Editor.

My first formal oral history interviews as a graduate student in 2009 were with members of the Yates Class of 1958, and it changed my understanding of historical research. Even though I went through school in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), I did not know much about Yates, or any of the Black schools, because the system was segregated. When my high

school, Westbury, “integrated” in 1968, we started with one Black student and one Black teacher. None of this caused a stir except among the parents opposed to desegregation.

Meeting and getting to know Deloris Johnson, Donald Dickson, Thelma Robins Gould, and Thurman Robins from the Yates class of 1958 was rewarding. They became my dear friends and taught me oral history’s value in learning from history makers. As a historian, I had researched racial disparities in education, but I was unfamiliar with how that played out in my hometown. I had never heard of James D. Ryan, William Holland, or the Turkey Day Classic that raised such passion among the Yates alumni.

A native of Navasota, J. D. Ryan graduated from Prairie View A&M in 1890 and started teaching in Houston. In 1900 he became a math teacher at Houston Colored High School, and in 1912, the district promoted him to principal. When Yates opened as the second high school for Black students, HISD chose Ryan to lead it. Highly popular, he did many things to support his students and the school, even personally covering expenses when needed; however, he also tried to get what he could without “rocking the boat.”

When Ryan died in 1940, assistant principal William Holland replaced him. Born in 1904, he came of age during the New Negro movement – a period of racial consciousness. Holland was committed to improving conditions for his students, and he definitely rocked the boat. He insisted on new textbooks instead of hand-me-downs with missing pages, he required equipment for science labs, and he expected his students to march in parades like other bands, in front of the horses instead of behind them where they had to dodge the droppings. He demanded Yates receive a proportion of event proceeds comparable to white schools, especially for the Turkey Day Classic football game between Yates and Wheatley that drew tens of thousands of spectators.

The thing that resonates with me the most about Yates is how these alumni, almost seventy years after their graduation, still remember Professor Holland. They speak of his advocacy with reverence and his mistreatment with anger. And they live by the principles of excellence that Holland instilled in them: failure is not an option, work twice as hard and be twice as good, be prepared to excel, and do not take a backseat to anybody.

As the students and I worked on these articles, we came to appreciate the struggles Yates’s students faced for a century; yet, they still found ways to excel in sports, the arts, law, politics, and education. For example, Deloris, Donald, Thelma, and Thurman spent their careers as educators, making a difference in the lives of young people just as Holland had done for them. I hope that you, too, will find these Yates stories inspiring.

Other articles in this magazine speak to education, albeit in different ways. The celebration of the University of Houston’s M.D. Anderson Library’s seventy-fifth anniversary demonstrates the growth and contributions of the library over time. UH’s first freestanding library space marked a milestone in the university’s quest to be recognized as a research institution.

In the heyday of print newspapers, Hubert Roussel educated the public with his reviews of the performing arts, noted for “his acerbic wit, his bold advocacy for cultural progress, and his eloquent writing.” Today this style of journalism is becoming a lost art; nevertheless, the article makes you feel the excitement of the bygone era.

Lastly, the photo essay of Montrose is a window into this historic community that has undergone change but still shines through the camera lenses of UH Global Studies and Anthropology students as they interpret the sights around them.

Houston History proudly celebrates the people and institutions educating Houstonians over the past century. **HH**



Members of the Class of 1958, left to right, Thurman Robins, Ed.D.; Verna Faye Watson, whose mother was in the first Yates class and whose son also graduated from Yates; Rev. Donald Dickson; singer Johnny Nash; Deloris Johnson, Dr. J. D. Collins Jr.; and Thelma Robins Gould.

Jack Yates High School at 100

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Cover artwork: The George Floyd Black Lives Matter mural by artist Jonah Elijah was unveiled in front of Yates High School on Alabama Street in 2021. A Yates alumnus and football player, Floyd was killed by Minneapolis police in 2020. The lion is Yates's mascot; crimson and gold are the school colors.

Artwork courtesy of Jonah Elijah and photo by 2C2K photography on Flickr.

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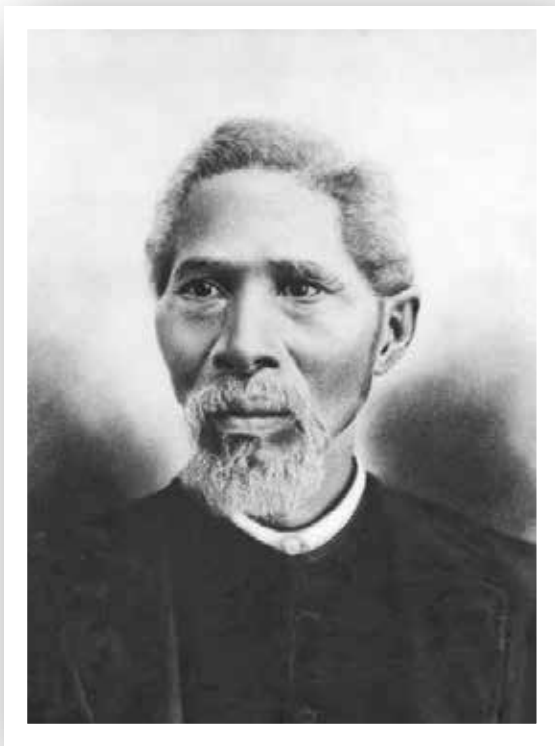
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Jack Yates: A Pillar of Prosperity in Houston's Third Ward

By A'viyon M. Robinson

Rev. John Henry "Jack" Yates (1828–1897) was a father, husband, man of God, community leader, and entrepreneur. In 1926, students honored Yates's legacy by voting to name their new school Jack Yates Senior High School. Photo in the public domain.

When mentioning Jack Yates High School to a native Houstonian, they might recount fond memories or well-known anecdotes about a school whose legacy is inextricably tied to Houston's Third Ward. What many may not know, however, is the intricate history of the high school's namesake. Reverend John Henry "Jack" Yates was a minister, educator, and pillar in the city's Black community dating back to the 1860s. From his childhood and early years spent in enslavement in Virginia to his storied journey into southern Texas during the Civil War and emancipation period, Jack Yates remains an illustrious figure whose impact spans beyond the crimson and gold.

Childhood to Freedom in 1865

Jack Yates was born on July 11, 1828, in Virginia to enslaved parents Robert and Rachel Yates. When the mistress of the property passed away, Rachel became the caregiver to the enslaver's son who taught Yates how to read and write, despite the practice being illegal at the time.¹ Reading became a pastime that consumed Yates in all that he did, from his time working in the fields to his participation in religious spaces. Such a skill set was invaluable throughout his formative years, making it possible for Yates to sustain himself when upward social and economic mobility was nearly impossible for Black Americans.

Built in 1870, just five years after emancipation, the Jack Yates House stands at The Heritage Society in Sam Houston Park as a testament to Yates's commitment to family and community uplift. While at Antioch Baptist Church, he taught financial literacy and skills like carpentry so members could achieve financial independence.

Photo courtesy of The Heritage Society.

As Yates spent his adolescence and early adulthood earning money by fishing and working on his enslaver's property, he remained steadfast in the church, which regularly held religious events organized by its Black congregation. Yates put his literacy skills to use in church ventures that were rooted in the interests of his community. Yates's involvement in these gatherings enabled him to network and fellowship with like-minded individuals such as his future wife, Harriet, who came from a neighboring plantation. Around this time, Yates



bought his freedom and was on the path to living a life of his own choosing. His marriage to Harriet and the expansion of their budding family was a step in the right direction.²

Unfortunately, circumstances beyond his control forced Yates to make one of the hardest decisions of his life. In 1863, Harriet's enslaver moved his property to a plantation in Matagorda County, Texas, to flee the Civil War and was unwilling to grant Harriet her release. To avoid separating his young family during this cross-country move, Yates, a free man in Virginia, willfully returned to enslavement, joining Harriet and their children in the move to Texas.³ The Yates family remained enslaved on the Matagorda property until the Civil War ended and the issuing of General Order No. 3 on June 19, 1865, which marked the end of chattel slavery in Texas. Finally afforded their collective freedom, the Yates family relocated to Houston to begin their lives anew.

Entrepreneurship Following Emancipation

Once in Houston, Yates settled in the Freedmen's Town area of Fourth Ward, where he worked as a freight hauler and drayman. Economic stability was a key pursuit, evidenced by his business endeavors that allowed him to purchase property in the region and spread his knowledge of financial literacy amongst his community members. On weekends, Yates continued his leadership role by preaching sermons to the faithful, earning him a reputation as a well-known and highly sought-after minister. He remembered the work he had done within the church during his youth and utilized those experiences as the foundation for uplifting his new community in Houston.⁴

In 1867, Texas held the First Black Baptist Convention following a push from Northern Baptists to bring Christian ministry to the newly freed Black population after the Civil War. There, Yates was officially ordained as a reverend by a missionary from Galveston. Just one year later, he found a permanent church home, becoming the first full-time minister of Antioch Baptist Church, Houston's first African American Baptist church. Yates's pastoral efforts further solidified him as an enterprising and entrepreneurial man whose past experiences of racialized hardship did little to deter him from the life he sought to create.⁵

Service to Third Ward and Greater Houston

More than anything, Yates was a man who believed in the power of family, community, and working together for racial uplift. From the time he arrived in the city, he set about strengthening the community and invested in the holistic liberation of the Black community, believing in enrichment beyond the church steps. With the help of Antioch's congregation, the church partnered with Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church (now Trinity United Methodist) to purchase ten acres of land on Dowling Street (now Emancipation Avenue) in 1872. This land became Emancipation Park, where Black residents could hold their annual Juneteenth celebrations. The park also offered a space



Yates's daughters, Martha Yates Jones and Pinkie Yates, sit in a decorated carriage in front of Antioch Baptist Church, ready to participate in the 1908 Juneteenth Celebration. Festivities included community events like parades, barbecues, baseball games, and prayer services.

Photo courtesy of the Olee Yates McCullough Papers Collection, MSS 0155, African American History Research Center at the Gregory School.

where the Black community could celebrate, commune, and collaborate on their own, and it remains a staple for doing so by hosting cultural events, political rallies, sports activities, classes, and memorials to name a few of its community outreach activities.⁶

In addition to cofounding Emancipation Park, Yates played an instrumental role in establishing Houston Academy in 1885 to educate Black children and formerly enslaved people who were prohibited from learning to read prior to emancipation. Yates cared greatly for the education of his community, from children to elders alike. Having religious, academic, and natural spaces for Black Houstonians to further themselves was a lifelong mission for Yates, who seldom missed an opportunity to advance his cause.⁷

Jack Yates's Legacy

Yates passed away on December 22, 1897, at the age of sixty-nine.⁸ Jack Yates High School was named in his honor, opening in 1926 as the second Black high school in Houston. The high school made an important contribution to Black Houstonians at the time and upholds its legacy today as a school laden with rich cultural significance for many who attended or grew up in the area.

Today, Reverend John Henry "Jack" Yates is remembered by many for his religious work, community service, and steadfast dedication to the Black community in Houston, Texas. Both Yates's home and Antioch Baptist Church still stand today, welcoming visitors of all ages, races, and origins to continue upholding the legacy of a man whose benevolent spirit and enduring work ethic have left behind a culture so cherished that it has become inseparable from the city of Houston. ■■

A'Viyon Robinson is a third-year history student at the University of Houston. As a native Houstonian, her interests include community enrichment and preservation, as well as archiving and actuating the oral histories of the city's more marginalized communities.

Jack Yates High School and Third Ward: Changing Together



By Antonio Lopez and Andres Rios

The original Jack Yates campus, located at 2610 Elgin, was the second Black high school in Houston. The school became a pillar of the community and a beacon of education in the Third Ward. The school has been home to notable alumni, from musicians and artists to activists and politicians.

Photo courtesy of the Sloane Collection.

A pillar of the Third Ward community, Jack Yates High School has a rich history that spans a century. Its namesake, Reverend John Henry “Jack” Yates, a formerly enslaved man, rose to prominence in Houston in the late 1860s by promoting community betterment through education and faith. Yates High School’s history reflects a similar story of challenges, resilience, and triumph.¹ From its founding in 1926, through segregation and beyond, Yates has undergone tremendous change.

Houston’s industrial growth at the turn of the twentieth century offered African Americans a chance to escape the exploitation of sharecropping and other agricultural labor that had contributed to the economic stagnation of the first post-emancipation generation. The city’s Black population increased from 19,894 in 1900 to 33,960 by 1920, with many of the new arrivals seeking economic opportunities. As the number of migrants and their families grew, their children required an education.²

Houston, like many southern cities, was segregated. Those wielding political power limited opportunities for many African Americans by restricting funding for school buildings, books, and equipment. Thus, few schools fully addressed the students’ needs, even though enrollment at all grade levels steadily rose between 1910 and 1930. In 1910 Houston had 3,565 Black students enrolled; by 1920 the number reached 6,520 and, in 1930, 12,419.³

Houston schools saw some improvement in the 1920s, including in Black schools. In 1924, Houstonians voted to make their school district independent of city government and subsequently hired a new superintendent, Dr. Edison E. Oberholtzer (1924–1945). In 1925, the district announced plans to build a new high school in the Third Ward for African American students. Two locations were proposed, one on Elgin Street and the other on Dowling Street (now Emancipation Avenue). HISD appropriated \$70,000 from a \$3 million bond for the construction of the new school; nevertheless, *The Informer* newspaper argued the funding should be ten times that amount to reflect the size of the Black community. The district then proposed a \$4 million bond, allocating \$500,000 to build schools and upgrade seventeen others in the Black community.⁴ This included Jack Yates High School, which opened in 1926, and Phillis Wheatley High School, which opened in Fifth Ward in 1927.

Separate but Equal

The “separate but equal” restrictions legalized by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) and Jim Crow laws cemented the divide between the White and Black populations. White schools had better infrastructure and more resources allocated to them, while Black schools were often overcrowded, lacked equipment and books, and had inferior facilities and less funding. The original Yates campus was

much smaller compared to White schools like Milby or Reagan (now Heights), built at the same time.⁵

The original campus lacked sports facilities such as a football field where the team could practice, and Yates played its games in West End Park and Buffalo Stadium, until 1942 when HISD opened Public School Stadium (later renamed Jeppesen and then Robertson Stadium). Separate but equal also affected the curriculum. HISD schools offered its students college prep courses or vocational training; however, these opportunities were limited in Black schools.⁶

Funding and pay differences between Black and White schools and staff were stark. White teachers earned twice as much as Black educators despite having less training. These disparities stemmed from racial bias in state and local funding. Local officials provided minimal resources for Black schools, neglecting the community's request for equitable facilities. Occasionally, officials built new schools or updated aging facilities in Black neighborhoods, but these efforts were largely ineffective and aimed to appease the community's loud criticism.⁷



The founding faculty of Yates played an instrumental role in establishing the school as the academic benison that the Third Ward community needed for its youth.

Photo courtesy of 1991 Reunion Program,
African American History Research Center, Houston Public Library.

Yates High School's First Twenty-five Years

Jack Yates Senior High School opened its doors on February 8, 1926, becoming Houston's second high school for African Americans. Opening the school with about 600 students and seventeen teachers, HISD built Yates to alleviate overcrowding at Houston Colored High School in the Fourth Ward. Located at 2610 Elgin, the two-story building had approximately thirty classrooms, a boys' gymnasium on

the first floor and a sewing room and library on the second floor. However, the completed building was smaller than the original plans, which also included a tennis court and a large track field. In 1927, the *Houston Informer* reported on the first commencement in which one of Jack Yates's granddaughters presented a portrait of Yates to the school and another sang, in keeping with his legacy.⁸

James D. Ryan, an 1890 graduate of Prairie View A&M and an advocate for education, served as Yates's first principal until his death in 1940. Under Ryan, with the cooperation of Wiley and Prairie View colleges, Yates hosted the first summer school for Black teachers. The school faced funding issues from the start, yet Ryan sought solutions within the Black community rather than confronting White peers, administrators, or city officials about reform. Beloved by his students, "Professor Jimmie" used his own funds to supplement programs, teacher salaries, school supplies, and the salaries of skilled instructors. His dedication helped establish music departments, athletic teams, and foreign language programs such as Latin, Greek, French, and German in Black schools, leading many students to have successful careers in education and the arts. After Ryan's passing, HISD promoted Yates's assistant principal William S. Holland to principal,



The district chose the principal at Houston Colored High School, James D. Ryan, as Yates's first principal. His advocacy and resilience pushed the school forward, establishing its reputation in the community.

Photo courtesy of *The Lion Yearbook*, 1941.

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Long known for its persistence in showing up for the community, Yates summer school offerings enabled students to expand their academic skills and give them an advanced start when the regular session commenced.

Photo courtesy of *The Informer* and the Portal to Texas History.



Yates moved to 3703 Sampson in 1958, which was a much needed improvement at the time. The building remained in use for sixty years.

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

who became an outspoken advocate for the students and school improvements.⁹

Under Holland, Yates High School continued to offer a wide range of courses, with core classes like reading, writing, math, science, and history, but also vocational training like sewing and cooking for girls, and technical training like welding, construction, plumbing, and auto mechanics for boys. Yates provided summer school classes to elementary and high school students, offering remedial classes, known as “drill courses,” and “advanced work” for a tuition fee. From 1927 to 1947, the campus hosted night classes for the Houston Colored Junior College (1927-1934) and Houston College for Negroes (1934-1947), later renamed Texas Southern University.¹⁰ This early leadership helped to build a stronger community for Houston’s Black families, honoring the school’s namesake, who spent his life trying to lift others through education.

Integration Challenges

By the 1950s, more than 2,000 students attended Yates. Since the school’s designers intended it to accommodate 1,600 students, the Southern Association of Secondary Schools attempted to revoke the school’s accreditation, but Holland stalled the process until the new facility opened later that year. The new building, erected at 3703 Sampson, stood about a mile from the original campus and inbetween the University of Houston and Texas Southern University. Holland secured upgrades for the new campus, including chemistry labs and an auto mechanic building, but he never got to enjoy the fruits of his labor.¹¹

Many believed HISD punished Holland for his outspokenness when the school board brought in Dr. John Codwell, from archrival Phillis Wheatley High School in Fifth Ward, to serve as principal at the new Yates High School. HISD essentially demoted Holland, who remained at the old building, which had been repurposed as James D. Ryan Junior High School. Despite community protests from families in Third and Fifth Wards, HISD refused to change the assignments.¹²

But the community would not be silenced entirely. Although they could not get Holland reinstated at Yates, or Codwell at Wheatley, they elected Hattie Mae White to the Board of Education in 1958, the first African American to break the color line of the previously all-White school board.

Ryan Middle School met the educational needs of Third Ward youths until 2013, when HISD voted to close the school due to its low enrollment. The district converted it to the Baylor College of Medicine Academy at Ryan, a magnet school aimed at preparing students for admission to DeBakey High School for the Health Professions. Many community members opposed the closure, and the NAACP urged the district to improve the school, which had seen its library closed and classes in the arts and foreign language studies eliminated. The loss of these facilities contributed to the steady decrease in enrollment, which, in turn, affected HISD’s willingness to fund the school under its enrollment-based funding model. These changes, along with the growth of charter schools and Houston’s shifting demographics, led to the closure of Ryan Middle School. The community was upset, given the school’s long history in Third Ward and that the closure forced parents to move their children to schools outside the neighborhood.¹³



In 1966, the final year of the PVIL, Yates won the 1966 4A Football State Championship. Coach Patterson, Principal Alexander, Captain Blai, and Co-captain Stevenson show off the trophy.

Photo courtesy of the African American History Research Center, RGD0006-1966-4397-02.

Ryan Middle School was not the only school to face these survival challenges, especially those that were directly affected by the 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Houston ISD did not begin desegregating until the matter was forced upon the district in 1956 by Judge Ben C. Connally's decision in the *Ross v. HISD* case. Despite this victory, Connally had not provided a cohesive plan for desegregating the school district, which reluctant school leaders and residents used to their full advantage. It took until 1960 to see real progress, when Houstonians voted two to one against desegregation. In response, J. W. Edgar, the Texas State Commissioner of Education, withheld \$5 million in funds from HISD.¹⁴

This started the desegregation process in Houston, but the gears of change grind slowly. HISD integrated one grade level per year, starting with the first grade, which frustrated the Black community seeking full desegregation. In 1965, around 9,000 students from Houston's Black high schools protested the slow pace of progress. The founder of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church and a civic leader, Reverend William Lawson, played a significant role in integrating the district, and under his leadership, boycotts ensued. Students withheld their attendance while roughly 2,000 students, parents, and faculty marched sixty-two blocks to HISD headquarters, "where they were met by barbed wire, padlocked fences and police." HISD did not fully desegregate until 1984, following the settlement of *Ross v. HISD*.¹⁵

Effects of Integration on the Community

Some Houstonians believe integration slowly killed the dynamics and culture of Yates and Third Ward's Black community. Alumni Deloris Johnson attributed student success to the support of the school's teachers and principal Holland: "[They encourage[d] the students, let them know what they could become, what they could achieve ... when you have that kind of encouragement you can't help but want to do something."¹⁶ Students that grew up after integration, on the other hand, did not experience the same type of community cohesion and support that arose during Jim Crow. Living under segregationist policy necessitated strong support networks against a system that set them up for failure.

Prairie View Interscholastic League (PVIL), which was responsible for games like the Turkey Day Classic, dissolved and merged with the historically White-serving University Interscholastic League. Since all district games had to be completed by the second week of November, the classic Yates versus Wheatley game was no longer possible. With that, the Turkey Day game ceased to exist, and decades-long traditions surrounding it became a thing of the past. However, the game did not disappear forever. Donald Dickson, a former Yates football player who participated in the Classic and director of HISD's Barnett Stadium, hosted one last game in



Yates's athletic programs have been popular since the school's founding. The school has a strong football and basketball program, which was ranked number one in the nation by USA Today in March 2010.

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

the 1990s that brought back the old players, with band and drill members.¹⁷ Decades later, this game still drew a significant crowd to Robertson Stadium.

In addition to the loss of beloved school traditions, Black-owned businesses and restaurants began to vanish, replaced by corporate chains and franchises. Reflecting on the gentrification of his neighborhood, Yates alumnus Sammie Taylor reminisced, "We had our own cafés, our own barbecue places, our own chicken place, but when all this McDonald's started coming into our neighborhoods, they killed our community ... [they] killed all our Black businesses."¹⁸

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 also encouraged some middle to upper-class residents to move to the suburbs for better opportunities, especially high-achieving students and teachers seeking additional resources. HISD diverted financial resources to its magnet programs in the 1970s, leaving schools like Yates in the dust. Although these programs were intended to increase integration, they neglected pre-existing programs in predominantly Black and Brown schools.¹⁹

1980 to the Present

The 1990s marked changes in Yates's leadership, who took dramatic steps to stop declining enrollment, which had decreased from 2,700 in 1985 to just 1,900 in 1991. When George W. Bush was elected as governor of Texas in 1994, he ushered in a new focus on education accountability. When HISD's new superintendent, Rod Paige, investigated Yates High School, the principal reported that many Yates-zoned students were transferring or attending magnet schools elsewhere. During this time, nearly half of Yates' faculty were replaced by teachers from Teach For America, who held proper teaching certifications but were not a good fit for the well-established culture at Yates. What was meant to be a move



Yates broadcast journalism program, which began in 1978, had a full functioning onsite studio.

Photo courtesy of the African American Research Center, RGD0006N-1979-2838-5A.

to shake up Yates and stop declining enrollment removed familiar faces and multigenerational relationships between students, parents, and the prior staff. By losing teachers with over twenty years of experience, some of whom taught their students' parents, that community history and trust was lost. Nonetheless, staff members who remained and alumni have continued to regard the school positively. Coach Clarence McKinney, class of 1988, returned to Yates in the mid-2000s to take over the football team and teach, saying, "I went into education to give back. Where better to give back than to a child who was just like me, fifteen, twenty years ago?"²⁰

In 2013, Houston ISD began planning to remodel the Sampson campus, utilizing a \$30 million federal grant and an additional \$749,000 from HISD to support Yates feeder pattern schools in the neighborhood. Construction was completed in 2018, with the total cost of the renovation reaching \$65 million. A grand celebration marked the start of the 2018-19 school year, with halls filled with music and cheers. About twenty alumni gathered at the school's main entrance, chanting school songs. The new campus consists of a three-story building with core learning centers, a one-story performance wing with an auditorium, fine arts and JROTC spaces, a gymnasium and athletics area, and an extensive dining commons with floor-to-ceiling windows.²¹ The building can accommodate 1,300 to 1,500 students with room to grow.

Resolving earlier issues, the renovation showcased two magnet programs offered at Jack Yates High: the School of Communications and the Maritime Academy, both offering industry certifications as Adobe Creative associates upon course completion. The School of Communications includes courses in audio/video production and graphic design, where production students learn design skills for advanced radio, film, and television. Graphic designers learn graphic and animation design techniques for online and print delivery. Yates's communications program is the oldest in HISD, with its photography program dating back to 1950 and its broadcasting journalism program beginning in 1978. In the

Maritime Program, students learn materials handling and port logistics, earning credentials as a logistics associate. The Port of Houston's Maritime Education Program works closely with high schools and universities to educate and train students in the maritime industry.²²

The Texans, the NFL Foundation, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) pledged \$450,000 in 2021 to renovate and resurface Yates's football field, with the Texans also donating their artificial surface from NRG Stadium.²³

Progress has been made in the reinvestment of Yates over the past few years. In 2014, HISD committed to spending over \$1 million on the campus and its feeder pattern schools.²⁴ Ted Irving, magnet program coordinator, emphasized the importance of having quality courses that will set Yates students up for success upon graduation. "It's the same rule we've all grown up with in the Black community, meaning you've got to be ten times better than your competition. That's the goal here."²⁵ This idea has been echoed by principals at Yates and teachers since the school's inception.

Yates has experienced a transformation and reemerged as a premier Third Ward school, home to a variety of advanced programs that serve to nurture neighborhood youth. Yates has aided the community, and the community has the opportunity to continue aiding Yates. Volunteers can lend assistance to the school's feeder campuses, and employers are encouraged to host field trips and job shadowing for students.²⁶ High-quality education, combined with attention to detail regarding local industry demands has been a conscious effort to ensure that this historically underserved community has resources close to home that will allow them to spend time gaining career experience in the neighborhood that raised them. **HH**

Antonio Lopez recently earned his bachelor's degree in history at the University of Houston. He is a transcript evaluator at Texas Southern University and a former *Houston History* intern.

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Jack Yates High School as it stands today. The campus is one of forty schools that has been renovated and upgraded through HISD's 2012 bond program.

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Salva Magister:

The Service of Hazel Hainsworth Young

By Heather Butina-Sutton



Hazel Hainsworth Young with her students at Jack Yates High School, 1949. A lifelong educator, Young taught Latin at Yates for thirty-two years. Richard Hayes Sr. said, "The teachers like Mrs. [Hazel] Hainsworth and Mrs. Virginia Miller who taught me Latin...were the heroes, nuns of our time. They really made us."

Photo Courtesy of the Reverend Jack Yates Family and Antioch Baptist Church Collection, MSS 0281, box 2, folder 4, African American History Research Center at the Gregory School, Houston Public Library.

Hazel Anne Hainsworth was born to Harry Alvin Hainsworth and Beatrice Cornelia Morre Hainsworth on September 12, 1905, in Navasota, Texas. At five years old, Hazel's parents relocated her and her younger brother, Robert Wendell (1909-1981), to Houston's Fifth Ward, which housed twenty percent of the city's growing African American population. By the time her sister, Maye Frances (1913-2013), was born three years later, her father had begun his career with the U.S. Postal Service as a mail carrier. It was a time of transition in Houston, like other cities, when streetcars transported people around town and automobiles were just beginning to appear on city streets. Young recalled her father's work with the post office in a 2007 interview, saying, "They had him with a horse and wagon," adding, his "horse knew every stop on Main Street." Meanwhile, her mother stayed at home to raise Hazel and her siblings. Throughout

her life Hazel spoke fondly of her parents, especially when it came to education. "They sacrificed so much ... to send us to college, all three of us."¹

In 1921, Hazel graduated from Houston's Colored High School (later renamed Booker T. Washington High School) and moved to Washington, D.C. to study Latin at Howard University. She recalled how some of her classmates at Howard were surprised by her math, science, and language abilities. Despite being an underfunded school in the segregated South, Colored High was one of the oldest public African American schools in the United States and had focused its curriculum on both vocational training and liberal arts studies. The three-story, ten-room schoolhouse stood in the Fourth Ward at the intersection of San Felipe Street (now West Dallas) and Frederick Street.² When Hazel graduated from Howard, she chose to return to Houston where she began her teaching career.

Hazel's first position in Houston schools was as a substitute teacher at the newly built Jack Yates High School in 1926, but it was not long before administrators brought her on full-time to teach Latin. Hazel attributed the success of those early years to Third Ward's community. "Parents and teachers were very cooperative," she said. "We never would have just kept going ... had the parents not been wonderful." In addition to parental support, Hazel and her colleagues

Hazel Hainsworth Young graduated from Howard University where she excelled in languages, math, and science.

Photo courtesy of 1925 Howard University yearbook and Wikimedia Commons.





Hazel Young embodied the Alpha Kappa Alpha motto: "By Culture and By Merit." Hazel Hainsworth Young and Robert W. Hainsworth Papers, MSS 0031, box 1, folder 1, African American History Research Center, Houston Public Library.

helped each other avoid segregated transportation by carpooling. "I bought a car and transported my friends," she recalled. "They would pay me to take them to school and back, and I'd use that to buy the gas ... I had a nice group ... [but] this fella ... he'd be late every evening."³

Hazel later became the dean of girls at Yates before transferring to Wheatley High School in 1958. That year Houston Independent School District (HISD) opened a new Yates High School building and demoted Yates's principal, William Holland, rather than allow Holland to take his place as head of the new school. HISD replaced him with the principal of archrival Phillis Wheatley High School, John Codwell, and, in the process, shuffled several faculty members between the schools as well. After approximately forty-six years of service, Young retired from HISD in 1972, and upon her death, was the last surviving member of Yates's original faculty.⁴

Young's students included notables such as Texas Representative Harold Dutton, Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee, Judge Andrew Jefferson Jr., Texas Southern University president Dr. Robert J. Terry, Houston City Councilmember Judson Robinson Jr., Congressman Mickey Leland, Reverend Robert Hayes Sr., and Katy Councilmember Marshherria Wilson.

Hazel Young's legacy reaches beyond her teaching career. While attending Howard University, Hazel pledged to Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Greek letter sorority for African American women in the country. Hazel joined AKA in 1922 while a student at Howard. In 1928, she and five other members, Gladys Davis Simon, Anna Belle Stokes, Erma Sweatt Wallace, Lillie Vance Chester, and Marie Viola Butler Taylor, organized the first AKA graduate chapter in Texas, Alpha Kappa Omega, whose goal was to "[promote] self-esteem and

unity...[empower] chapter members to excel academically [and] to bring out the best in each individual." Hazel also served as the Basileus (president) of the chapter in its early years from 1932 to 1933.⁵

During her eighty-seven years as an active member, Hazel gave back to the community through her service, which often focused on education. Some of her projects included volunteering with the Social Justice and Human Rights Committee at the Houston Alumni Youth Center for children aging out of foster care, donating school supplies to the Angel Tree Project for children of incarcerated parents, hosting food drives, and many more acts of service to Houston's Black community.⁶

By the time Hazel Hainsworth Young passed away in 2009, she had been "given her flowers" by AKA, HISD, and the community that loved her. In 1993, the City of Houston awarded her an Outstanding Achievement Award for her service as a sixty-nine-year member of AKA. Her honors from HISD include Jack Yates High School renaming its library in her honor in 2005, receiving a formal award for her service to the district in 2008, and a Special Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009 for her work at Yates. In addition, in 2009 she received the prestigious "Living Legend Award" from the NAACP.⁷

Hazel saw Yates High School and Houston's Third Ward go through many changes during her 103 years of life, but she remained dedicated to her students, peers, and community. Between her teaching, advocacy, and philanthropy, the words of Billy Regan, former HISD superintendent, seem appropriate: "Her service to the community reached across Houston and the entire state of Texas. Maybe even the world."⁸ **HH**

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The last four surviving members of Yates's inaugural faculty, are shown left to right: Mr. Rieras, Hazel Hainsworth, Hazel Eldrige, and Mr. Fonworth (n.d.).

Photo courtesy of the Hazel Hainsworth Young Photograph Collection, African American History Research Center, Houston Public Library, PH0002-022.



William S. Holland: Building a Civically Engaged Student Body

By Debbie Z. Harwell

A leader in the Third Ward community, William S. Holland served as principal of Jack Yates High School from 1941 to 1958.

Photo courtesy of Deloris Johnson.

When William S. Holland took on the role of principal at Jack Yates High School in 1941, he stepped into big shoes. The school and its first principal, James D. Ryan, had built a reputation central to the support and development of Houston's Third Ward. The high school opened in 1926 as the city's second "colored" high school, and Ryan, an East Texas native and seasoned local educator, served as the school's head until his death in 1940, when Holland succeeded him. During these years, Yates set an expectation of success and acted as the community's anchor.¹

The original building located at 2610 Elgin Street was both a social hub and educational institution. It hosted meetings and community events for the bustling neighborhood and welcomed students in grades seven through twelve. Built to accommodate 1,600 students, by the mid-1950s Yates's student body exceeded 2,200. Overcrowding threatened Yates's survival, but Holland kept the school operating until a new facility could be constructed. The new building opened in 1958 at 3703 Sampson, just a mile away. It should have been an improvement but, instead, marked a reversal from the school's position as a guiding force for the community.²

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) board replaced Holland with Dr. John Codwell, the principal of archrival Phillis Wheatley High School – an act that destroyed the community's cohesiveness and hampered its leadership. Desegregation in the 1960s sealed the community's fate as the neighborhood and the school saw a decline, but Third Ward's heritage and the memories of Professor William Holland remain alive.³

"Mr. Holland ... spoke out about what he thought was best for his students no matter what it was, no matter to whom he was speaking, he did not bite his tongue about what was right and wrong."

– Deloris Johnson, Yates Class of 1958

William S. Holland

William "Babe" Holland, born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on March 2, 1904, graduated from Indiana State Normal School in 1925. He attended graduate school at Tennessee State College and Indiana State Teachers College (formerly the Normal School and now Indiana State University). He played baseball and basketball and excelled in track, competing in the decathlon. His son, Bill Holland, said that White athletes from other schools would pick one or two athletes and throw their points to them to keep his father from winning.

As a result, William Holland learned "early on that there are things that you have to overcome. You either give in, or you overcome."⁴

Holland came to Houston in 1927 with a letter of introduction from Birch Bayh Sr.,

athletic director at Indiana State. Edison Oberholtzer, then superintendent of the Houston Schools, hired him to coach at Yates where he led teams to the 1930 Texas Negro High School football title and numerous track titles. He was promoted to assistant principal and, later, principal on Ryan's death. When Holland retired in 1974, he was the longest tenured principal in HISD's history.⁵

Though the national fight for desegregation and civil rights heated up in the 1950s, Yates 1958 class president, Napoleon Johnson, explained that nothing changed in Houston, so Yates students focused on graduating.



A star baseball player, Holland was quickly nicknamed "Babe," likening him to Babe Ruth.

Photo from Wabash Valley Profiles.



Both members of the class of 1958, Deloris Johnson and Napoleon Johnson (no relation) went on to careers in education and broadcasting respectively. Photo courtesy of Debbie Harwell.

Johnson remembered Holland speaking at assemblies and hearing “the pain in his voice because if he saw students acting in any way that was probably natural to some degree, ... just too much play and not enough seriousness, he would get on the microphone, and he would tell us about how difficult it was going to be, and that [we] are going to have to be twice as good, work twice as hard ... He was basically saying you need to wake up. You don’t have time to act the fool. ... We can prepare you, but you’ve got to be serious about getting prepared.”⁶

Reverend Donald Dickson, class of 1958, described Holland as a “personable administrator” and “a stern man ... a principal who did not play with children, but he would do anything that he could to help children.” Deloris Johnson, who acts as the 1958 class liaison, described Holland as a “man of great courage, of great responsibility, [who] just led his students to perfection. He told us we had to be the best that we could be because there was going to come a time when integration would come, and we were going to have to be able to fit in ... to be able to work in the world.” Edith Holland Nealy, Holland’s daughter, said he motivated students to go beyond what they thought they could do. “If you were having problems other than just being mentally off the pace, then you had a visit with him in the office to discuss your underachievement. There wasn’t a choice.”⁷

Holland set the example, and teachers followed suit. Nealy recalled, “All of the teachers expected you to achieve ... The parents were, I think, very happy to see that their children were being educated that way, that somebody really cared about their children.” Dickson agreed with that and explained that many of his teachers, who had also taught his mother, “would not allow you to fail ... If it came to

chastising you to get your attention ... or come to your house to tell your parents that you weren’t getting it done, or tell the coach that you are not passing ... you knew what was going to happen.” The students also worked for many of their teachers. Dickson cleaned his homeroom teacher’s house on Saturdays, wiping the windows and beating the rugs. “Our teachers lived in the same places where we lived ... between school, and church, and home, the paths [we] traveled were well-watched— [The teachers] were just like our parents, our uncles, and our aunts.”⁸

Yates graduate Judge Robert Anderson had the unique perspective of someone who experienced both integrated and segregated schools in the rural and urban South, as well as the North. Going to an integrated school in the North broadened his opportunities in many ways, including an expanded curriculum and field trips to Broadway plays. Nevertheless, Anderson noted, “The teachers at Jack Yates took personal concern whereas, in New Jersey, you didn’t get that kind of personal interaction and concern on the part of the teachers.” Looking back, he realized Holland and the faculty were “very outspoken” and the type of role models who exemplified leadership to the students and the community.⁹



Rev. Donald Dickson, a hall-of-famer from the Turkey Day game, was born in the Cuney Homes in Third Ward. After graduating from Yates and Texas Southern University, he became HISD’s first Black head coach at a predominately White school and served as an assistant principal and director of Barnett Stadium. Photo courtesy of Victor Matsumura.



Holland demanded HISD share the revenues produced by the massive crowds at the Turkey Day Classic in the same proportion as that received by White schools for their games. Many believed this contributed to the district's decision to demote Holland.

Photo courtesy of Yates and Wheatley High School.

Approach to Education and Segregation

Having been schooled in the era of racial uplift, Holland understood the importance of education. Bill Holland observed that his father's approach was "more than his personal philosophy, it was the community philosophy... It is the way black folks thought and how they valued education." He went on to explain, "In the days of segregation, the public schools had the best and brightest in the black community as teachers because basically, the jobs that black folks could get—good jobs—were post office, public school system, and a handful of doctors and lawyers. So, your teachers may have a master's degree or Ph.D. in physics or chemistry or mathematics." He added, "The student was the future of the race and ... [was] expected to take responsibility for their actions, for what they did to achieve."¹⁰

Holland was also outspoken about segregation. Referencing businesses that restricted Black patrons to certain days, Edith Holland Nealy explained, "The standard in our household was if you couldn't go the day you wanted to go, then you didn't go at all." That applied to the rodeo, Playland Park, which only opened to Black visitors on Juneteenth, and department stores where they had to "try on clothes in a broom closet." Bill Holland said, "We were raised with certain golden rules [like] 'why are you going to be stupid enough to give your money to someone who won't let you through the front door?'" Yates students received these same messages. Holland believed segregation presented obstacles to overcome, and each person must take on that responsibility.¹¹

Holland came to the defense of the marching band and arranged with the principals of HISD's other Black high schools to present a united front in refusing to march in the rodeo parade behind the horses and wagons, where they had to dodge the droppings. They were moved in front of

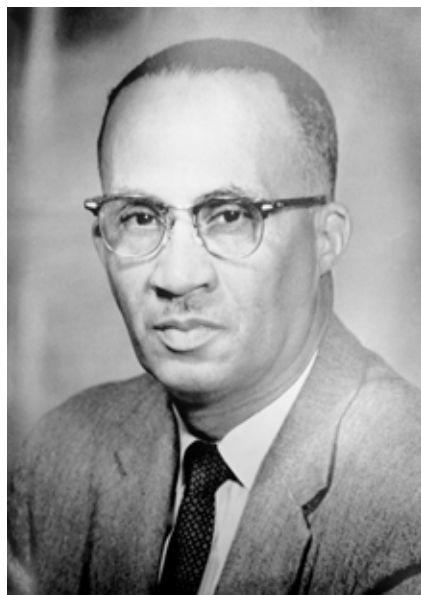
the animals. When they received textbooks that were worn out and missing pages from use by White students, Holland petitioned for materials equal to those received in White schools.¹²

Another source of dissension with HISD centered on the minimal revenues the school received from the Turkey Day football game that pitted Yates against its Fifth Ward rival, Phillis Wheatley High School. First played in 1927, the game became an annual Thanksgiving tradition in 1942 that created a strong community bond, drawing an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 spectators to Public School Stadium (later Jeppesen and then Robertson Stadium). Although the event was one of HISD's largest moneymakers, Holland had to fight for the school's fair share of the revenues. Not until the principals threatened to quit playing did the Black schools receive revenue comparable to that of White schools.¹³

Breaking the Spirit

While Holland's outspokenness made him a hero to Yates students and Third Ward, it made him controversial to HISD administrators. In 1958, after thirty-one years of service at Yates, seventeen of them as principal, Holland was told he would not move to the new Jack Yates High School. HISD essentially demoted Holland by forcing him to remain at the original building as the principal of what became Ryan Junior High School.¹⁴

The community presented a petition signed by 3,635 residents asking the school board to reconsider—students also signed a petition. The board refused to change its ruling, however. Board members Walter W. Kemmerer and Mrs. A. S. Vandervoort voted against all the administrative assignments in protest. While the community did not win a reprieve for Holland, they were victorious nonetheless when, later in 1958, voters stunned conservatives by electing the



Dr. John E. Codwell, who was promoted to principal of Wheatley in 1945, was transferred to Yates when the new campus opened in 1958.

Photo courtesy of Yates High School.

city's first African American to the school board, Hattie Mae White. Two years earlier, White had used the board's records to effectively demonstrate HISD failed to provide an equal education to Black students.¹⁵

Holland's children remembered members of the community wanted to bomb or burn down the new school, but Holland called for calm, believing HISD "had the right to reassign him but not the right to fire him."¹⁶

Rev. Dickson expressed the disappointment students felt, "Finally, the things that he had fought so hard to get for us—new chemistry labs and new auto mechanic buildings and just an upgrade in the school itself. ... We felt that the man who worked so hard to get us to that point should be able to enjoy the fruits of his labor." The insult did not stop there, however. "The slap in the face was that they brought a principal from our rival school ... from Wheatley." And Dr. John Codwell brought many of his teachers with him. Dickson surmised that HISD wanted to show Holland that "next time, maybe you will keep your mouth shut."¹⁷

The results were devastating. "It killed the school spirit," Dickson stated. Deloris Johnson agreed and explained that with the family of Yates teachers split between the new high school, Ryan Junior High School, and Wheatley, and with Holland no longer at the helm, the traditions vanished. It also changed the community. Dickson observed, "Yates did not have that decorum that they always had. They didn't have the faces of teachers ... [It had a] negative impact on the neighborhood and on the community ... the morale and the character of the school began to degrade ... because we were hurt."¹⁸

Wheatley and Fifth Ward felt an equally devastating impact at the loss of Codwell, who, like Holland, had risen through the ranks from coach to principal, and the loss of their faculty. Betty Taylor-Thompson, class of 1959, contended, "the whole idea of mixing up the principals ... was done to crack the black community, to try to keep us apart ... [and] crack that rise to the middle class that was happening from blacks



Judge Robert Anderson grew up in Houston and Austin County Texas. He started high school in New Jersey, returned to Yates for his junior and senior years, and later earned his law degree at Texas Southern. He was appointed to the Municipal Court by former mayor Louie Welch.

Photo courtesy of Victor Matsumura.

at Yates and Wheatley." William Jordan, a 1956 Wheatley graduate, said it made them mad and they wanted Codwell to refuse, but he would have lost his job either way.¹⁹

Lessons that Endure

Integration further exacerbated the negative effects felt by the Third and Fifth Wards—not that anyone would have said segregation was a better system. Alumni of Yates and Wheatley argued that the district sent inferior White teachers to the Black schools while sending the best Black teachers to the White schools. Edith Holland Nealey observed that integration "tore part" the sense of community. Deloris Johnson felt the gains from integration came at the price of change in the schools and neighborhoods. Homeowners moved to new areas and their houses became rental property; stores closed, and people no longer shopped in Third Ward.²⁰

William Holland retired after forty-seven years of service to HISD and was elected to the school board of trustees. The district named a middle school after him in 1979. Holland died on July 22, 1981, at the age of seventy-seven.²¹

Although Third Ward lost its once thriving community, the people did not lose the lessons they had learned from Holland, which they applied in their work and in raising their families. Deloris Johnson, who, like Holland, spent her career as an educator in HISD, approaches her work and life through one of Holland's most influential principles: "You are tomorrow what you were yesterday, plus the few changes that you make today." Dickson, a retired coach and assistant principal in HISD, added, "[O]ne of the greatest things that we learned from Mr. Holland was that we didn't have to take a back seat to anybody and that is because we were not inferior to anybody. We had a brain, we could think; we had eyes, we could see; we had a tongue, we could talk; we had legs, we could run; and we had a mind, we could think. He wanted us to use all of those contributing factors to become good and viable and productive men and women."²² And that they did. ■



William Holland, second from left with shovel, took part in the groundbreaking ceremonies for the middle school named in his honor.

Photo courtesy of William S. Holland Middle School.

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Alumni from Yates and Wheatley came to the unveiling of the historical marker for the Turkey Day Classic, which stands on the University of Houston campus at the site where the Turkey Day Classic was played from 1942 to 1966. Photo courtesy of the University of Houston.

THE TURKEY DAY CLASSIC IN THEIR OWN WORDS

By Debbie Z. Harwell

The nation's biggest high school rivalry football game took place on Thanksgiving Day in the heart of Houston, Texas, from 1942 to 1966 at Public School Stadium (later Jeppesen, then Robertson Stadium). Although Jack Yates and Phillis Wheatly High Schools had played each other since 1927, it became the regular Thanksgiving Day game due to its popularity, with as many as twenty to forty thousand fans turning out for the Black community's social event of the year. A historical marker now stands at that location in the shadow of the University of Houston's (UH) modern stadium, but one can still imagine the wonder of those glory days. Students at the UH Center for Public History had the pleasure of interviewing graduates from Yates and Wheatley High Schools to hear their memories of the Turkey Day Classic. Excerpts from those conversations follow.¹

What is the Turkey Day Classic?

Thurman Robins, Yates '58 (TR): The Thanksgiving Classic in Houston [was] the largest attended high school game in America, period. They had one rival game in Chicago which began in 1935, but it was an ... all-star game between the public schools and the Catholic schools.

Willie Jordan, Wheatley '56 (WJ): The Thanksgiving game was homecoming and people from all over the country came back for homecoming. ... So people had Thanksgiving parties the night before for the out-of-town guests ... [T]he students had a pep rally. It was wild. ... Everybody just stood up and cheered, they introduced the football team, the cheerleaders, the major, we had a band, the majorettes ... It was a party.

Betty Taylor-Thompson, Wheatley '59 (BTT): But it was an organized party. Don't say it was wild because everything at Wheatley, and I'm sure at Yates, was disciplined. We didn't have disciplinary problems.

Ralph Oaks, Wheatley '59 (RO): It wasn't a game between two teams ... it was a game with the neighborhood. You had people who never went to Wheatley High School, probably never graduated. But they were for Wheatley. ... If they knew a kid in the neighborhood was going to Wheatley and could not afford it, they would help him out. It was a community ... you don't have neighborhood schools anymore. ... The Thanksgiving game, it made people aware of what Wheatley was about, and it made them respect education.



The Wheatley Wildcat cheerleaders had a busy week leading up to the game. Their preparations included ensuring every aspect of the uniform was in pristine condition. Interview participant Betty Taylor (now Taylor Thompson) is center front.

All photos courtesy of Yates and Wheatley High Schools unless otherwise noted.

Deloris Johnson, Yates '58 (DJ): We were involved with the Turkey Day Classic way beyond our high school years because that was the main event of the year for Blacks in Third Ward, Fifth Ward, Fourth Ward and all over Houston.

Thelma Robins Gould, Yates '58 (TRG): There was always so much enthusiasm and excitement about the game ... when they were still in grade school. It was something you looked forward to once you got to Jack Yates ... from seventh to twelfth grade.

TR: [Thelma and I] lived in Cuney Homes for the first eight years of our lives. I can remember just as vivid as it was yesterday, I was about five years old, and I was playing outside in the yard and all of a sudden you hear this noise, this big roar "Woo!!" ... And then it would die down. And a few minutes later you'd hear it again. ... I asked my mom, "What is all that noise?!" She said, "Oh, they're playing that game over at the stadium [about three blocks away] that's the Yates-Wheatley Game."

Donald Dickson, Yates '58 (DD): [Going to coach's house at 9:00 a.m. I passed Thelma and Thurman's aunt's house] and



Twins Thelma Robins Gould and her brother, Thurman Robins, Ed.D., graduated in the Yates class of 1958. Thelma led the Ryan Kadets and Thurman was in the band and on the swim team.

Photo courtesy of Thelma Robins Gould.

she would be dressed and ready to go to the game. She'd be standing outside in her red and yellow; I mean she's got on red shoes, she's got on red stockings, yellow purse, yellow hat; and, listen, her words to me were, "If y'all don't beat Wheatley today, don't you come back home!"

What other ways did the spirit of competition shine through?

DJ: As a little girl I would stand in the window and watch the people walk down Alabama Street going to the game ... They were dressed in their finest suits, hats, furs. ... You had to look good for the Thanksgiving game. Men too.

Loretta Thompson-Williams, Wheatley '59 (LTW):

It was probably the most dressed up football game. We were dressed to a T.

RO: It started at 5 o'clock.

WJ: They would have eggs and have bacon, and a buffet in the school cafeteria. ... Wheatley started it. Then Yates followed. Yates had some connections with communication, they got on the radio, and then Wheatley pulled some folk to get on the radio. ... We were talking bad about the other [school] ... The momentum of getting ready to have a sure enough fight. I mean figuratively speaking.

Samuel Taylor, Yates '58 (ST): Each ward, Fifth Ward, Third Ward, they would have their parades. Wheatley would have their parades up and down Lyons Avenue. Yates would have their parade up and down Dowling [now Emancipation] ... before the game and ... Jeppesen Stadium parking lot would be full of people.

TRG: Everybody was excited! ... Those of us who were in the squadron, the Ryan Kadets, we practiced every day except on weekends because ... you had to get out there at halftime and ... perform your best.

DJ: You had to beat Wheatley's performance too!

WJ: Halftime was just like the game because you're going to compete ... We would always compete with how Miss Wheatley would come out, how Miss Yates would come out, and one time they would ... come out in a Cadillac, another [year] some antique car, horse and buggy ... But I will have to confess when Carolyn Wilkins from Yates came out in a helicopter ... we threw in the white flag. ... It was a spectacle!

Can you share some memories about the game?

RO: The game normally started at 2 o'clock. ... You were almost on the field because of the crowd. ... They had to put up temporary bleachers on the north side of the stadium ... where people stood at least five deep around the field ... My most memorable Thanksgiving was 1951. My first Thanksgiving game. Can you imagine a little 10-year-old kid ... with his father going to football game? We didn't have television back then, ... but to see 25,000-30,000 people at a football game. ... People stood up most of the time ... so my daddy had to put me up on his shoulders ... I'll never forget that.

ST: They would have security to keep them back.

TR: They had a reserved section for whites. At every game. And the reserved section were some of the best seats in the house like the fifty yard [line], for whites. And we had many whites!

DD: When [the players] used to go to the stadium ... we would roll in [Square Deal] cabs. We had forty boys, it would be three or four in a cab. ... We would go down Holman Street just blowing, make the cab driver just go “booooooop boooooooooooooop” they knew that was Yates coming from the school.

BTT: Every single time that football team hit the field, and we cheerleaders came out with them running, every one of those are precious memories to me. Because every time it was the most exciting part of the game ... We’d line up, wait for the football players to come, and ... you’d burst through [the paper banner.] ... It was the highlight.

EB: [My favorite memory] is simple, just running on that field. ... Once the game starts, you really don’t hear the crowd. ... I’ve got some Yates friends now and they don’t let me forget [that Yates won more games] either.

LTW: In the 1958 football season, only Booker T. Washington and Yates scored on us. ... Wheatley beat Yates 20 to 8. The other schools didn’t score on us at all, that was one of my fondest memories.

DD: Thanksgiving game our senior year [1957,] our quarterback was injured. Sammie Taylor was a running back ... [but] Coach Andrew “Pat” Patterson ... took Sammie Taylor, who ... was a pitcher on the baseball team, ... [he] threw about a sixty-yard pass, ... and we beat Wheatley 7-6. Sammie Lee had never played quarterback before that game, but he had those kinds of skills plus our coach ... include[d] plays that ... [Sammie] knew from the running back’s position.

Algenita Scott Davis, Wheatley ‘67: The last game that Wheatley won, that was Thanksgiving Day in 1960. And Ronald Frasier was [quarterback] ... [I saw him] years ago in Florida ... I said, “My name is Algenita Davis, you were



Co-captains of Yates and Wheatley meet for the coin toss to start the game.

on the team that scored 3-nothing.” I can remember that. I can’t tell you where I was yesterday, but I can tell you what happened Thanksgiving 1960! Because it was a family affair. Your entire day was built around that Thanksgiving Day game, ... watching the performances and having participated [in the drill team] and ultimately seeing my brother becoming the drum major of the Phillis Wheatley Wildcat band, and ... [flying] home [from college] to see him perform, that’s how big of a deal it was to me.

What brought the Classic to a close?

TR: What brought about the demise of the classic primarily was integration. ... All of the Black schools in Texas played in a league called Prairie View Interscholastic League ... that controlled all aspects of all the competition, whether ... athletics or music or debate, whatever. ... [T]he White schools had an organization that controlled their competition called the University Interscholastic League, UIL. So when [it] integrated, the PVIL became defunct. ... There were so many schools in the UIL as compared to the Black schools that their playoff system ... had bi-district and regional and a state championship game. That playoff system started in the first or second week of November, which meant that all of your district games had to be complete by [then. So if] ... Yates was going to play Wheatley, they had to play before Thanksgiving.

Walking a block from the historical marker and looking at the houses, I can close my eyes and imagine the excitement of people walking to the stadium from their Third Ward homes dressed in Yates’s crimson and gold, or Wheatley fans from Fifth Ward getting off the bus decked out in purple in white. Although the Yates-Wheatley game no longer draws those large crowds, those contests represented two things that should not be forgotten – a friendly, competitive rivalry and an unparalleled sense of community. ✚

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In 1958, Carolyn Wilkins of Yates and her court made their entrance by helicopter. No arrival before or after this one created such a stir.

While the Turkey Day Classic dominated Jack Yates High School sports history, other athletes and teams, led by outstanding coaches, made historic runs of their own in boys and girls basketball, baseball, track and field, and other sports.

In the early twentieth century, Houston's segregated public schools competed in the Texas Interscholastic League of Colored Schools formed in 1920, which changed its name in 1923 to Prairie View Interscholastic League (PVIL), under the Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College (now Prairie View A&M University). With 500 schools at its peak, the PVIL governed extracurricular activities, including sports, literature, and the arts, just as the University Interscholastic League (UIL) did for white schools. Athletic teams competed for championships in football, basketball, baseball, and track and field.¹

When schools desegregated in 1966, the PVIL merged into the UIL, and it created a playoff system with district, regional, and state competitions for all schools **HH**

Jorge Palomo is a junior history major and member of the Honors College at the University of Houston. He has interned at *Houston History* for two years.

Lions Sports Notes and Highlights

By Jorge Palomo



The 1949 boys basketball team won the Prairie View Interscholastic League (PVIL) city, district, and state championships with just two players returning from the previous year. Coach Andrew "Pat" Patterson (1911-2004), center top row, played Negro League baseball and taught at Yates in the offseason in the 1930s, designing the organizational plan for football under the PVIL. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942 and returned to teach at Yates from 1945 until 1967. An inaugural member of the PVIL Coaches Hall of Fame in 1980, he was also the first Black coach named to the Texas High School Coaches Association Hall of Honor after leading Yates's teams to over 15 state championships in various sports.²

Photo courtesy of the Jack Yates 1949 yearbook, *The Lion*.

YATES LIONS CHAMPIONSHIPS

State Championships:

- ✦ 3 Baseball, PVIL
- ✦ 10 Boys Basketball, PVIL (5), UIL (5)
- ✦ 1 Girls Basketball, UIL
- ✦ 5 Football, PVIL (4), UIL (1)
- ✦ 3 Boys Track and Field, PVIL

UIL District Championships:

- ✦ 11 Boys Basketball
- ✦ 11 Girls Basketball
- ✦ 30 Football, with 27 in a row (1970-1996)
- ✦ 4 Boys Track and Field
- ✦ 10 Girls Track and Field
- ✦ 2 Golf
- ✦ 3 Tennis
- ✦ 1 Volleyball

Coach Luther Booker (1928-1994) began coaching football at Houston's Booker T. Washington in 1957 and moved to Bellaire for a year before rising to head coach at Yates in 1971. When he retired in 1988 with a record of 168-37-6, he had notched more victories than any other Texas 5A football coach and won 18 district titles. Among his many honors, Booker was named Coach of the Decade by the Houston Chronicle for the 1980s.³

Photo courtesy of Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD0006-1989-1838.

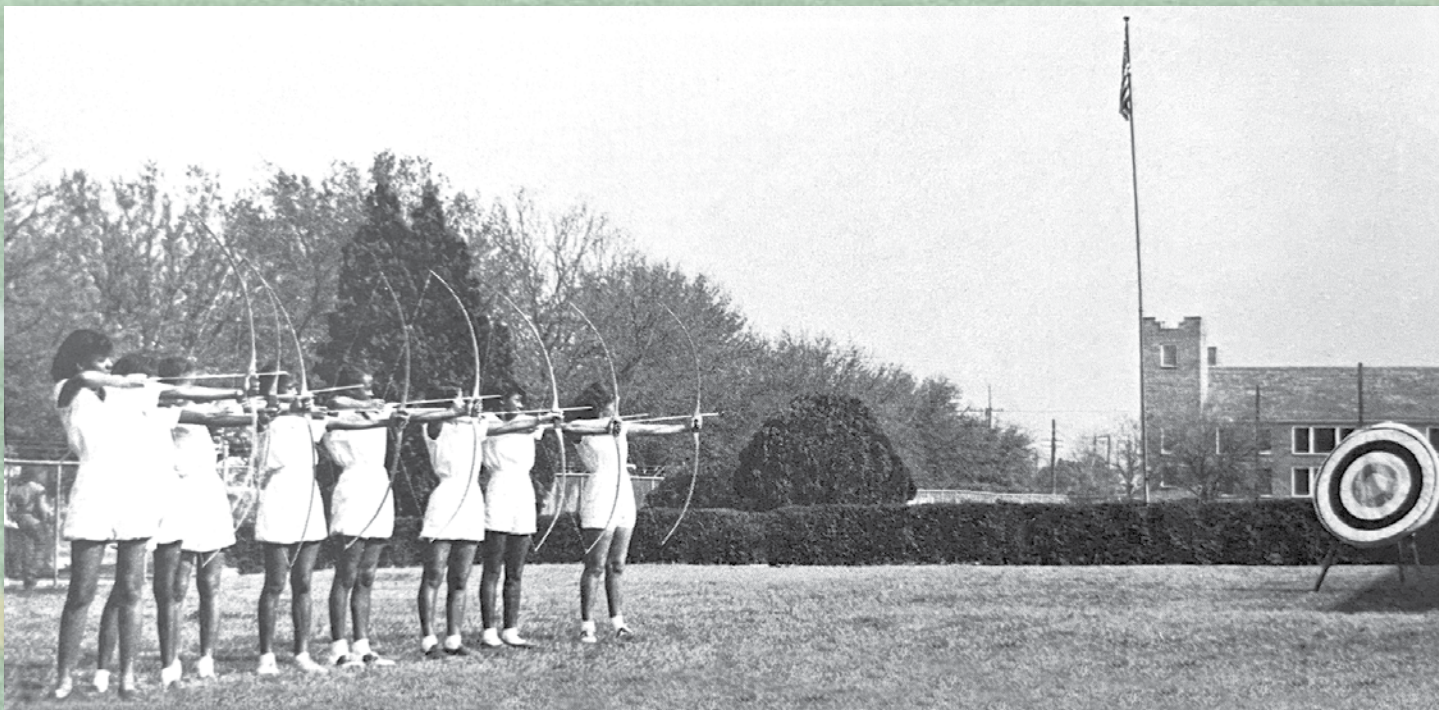


In 1985, Yates became the first Black high school to win the 5A State Championship, defeating Odessa Permian in a 16-0 season with a record eight shutouts. Some sports writers consider the team to be the best Texas high school football team in history. Johnny Bailey ran for 190 yards in the game and 1,101 for the season. An NCAA Division II Hall of Fame and Texas Sports Hall of Fame inductee, he played five seasons in the NFL.⁴



The Yates Lions won three PVIL state championships in Track and Field from 1956 to 1958. Even after joining the UIL, they remained in close competition with Wheatley High School in many sports, including track and field. Here George "Crazy Horse" Jones from Yates and Willie Blackmon from Wheatley compete in the 880-yard race, in which they traded wins during the 1969 season.⁵

Photo courtesy of the Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD0006-1969-1967-09.



Prior to the 1960s, opportunities in women's sports were often limited to physical education classes or light competition. Archery was one of those sports in 1949, led by instructor Mrs. A. P. Hackett.

Photo courtesy of *The Lion*, 1949 yearbook.



Both named all-stars, Carven Holcombe, left, and Monica Lamb, right, were standouts in Yates boys and girls basketball in the 1982-83 season. Lamb helped lead Yates to a 5A Girls UIL State Championship.⁶

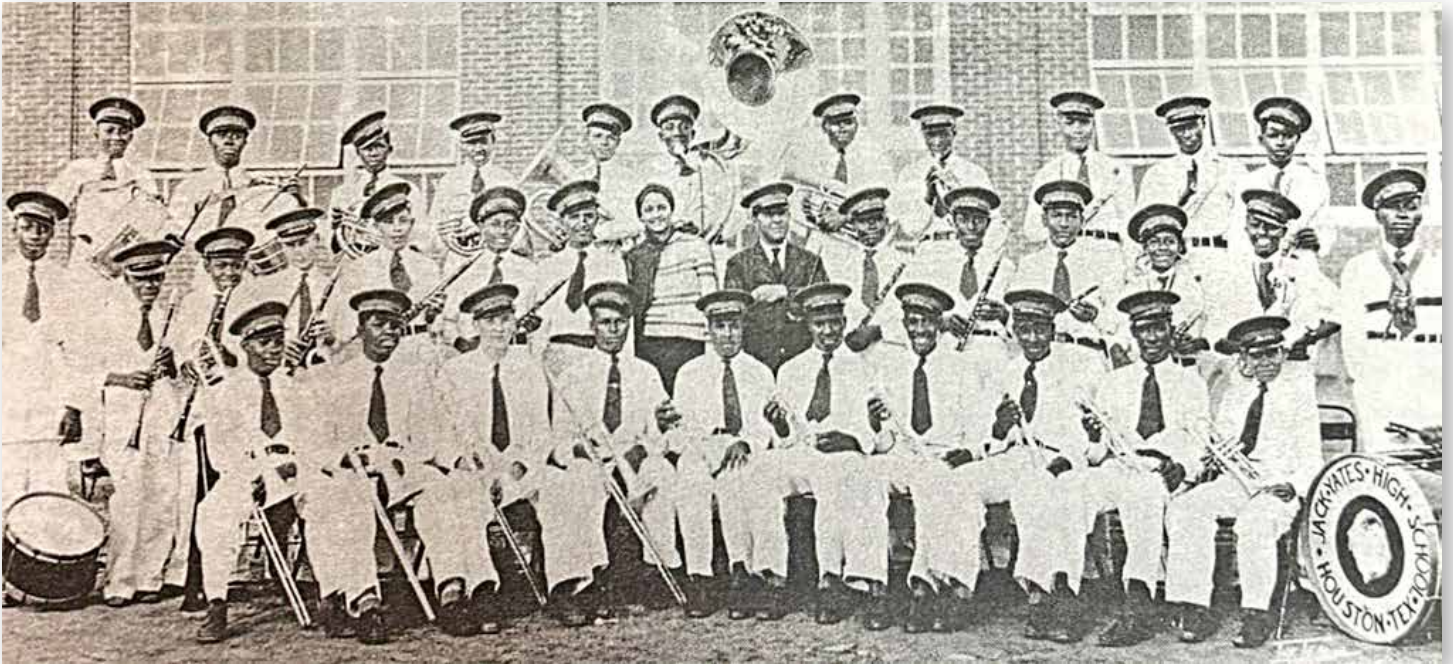
She went on to play for the University of Houston and University of Southern California and for the WNBA Houston Comets from 1998 to 2000 when the team won consecutive championships.

Photo courtesy of the Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD0006-1983-0526.

Hitting a High Note:

The Musical Legacy of Jack Yates High School

By Adithi Nythruva



The first Jack Yates band was formed five years after the school's opening, led by Charles B. Johnson, who, besides being a practicing dentist, was an accomplished trumpet player who instilled a love of jazz in the young players.

Photo courtesy of Conrad O. Johnson Collection, African American Research Center, Houston Public Library.

The year 2026 marks the centennial of Jack Yates Senior High School. Initially named Yates Colored High School, it opened with seventeen teachers and 600 students and has ushered in significant progress over the past century, from providing academic opportunities to fostering acceptance among those affiliated with it. The school's progression paralleled the priorities of its namesake, Reverend Jack Yates, a prominent civic leader and Baptist minister, who "emphasized education directed toward the youth as the future."¹ Among the many areas of instruction Yates High School offered in keeping with this ideal was a robust music program that recognized the value of arts to a well-rounded education.

Since the early twentieth century, music has transformed Houston's culture and woven together a tight-knit community amongst the growing African American population. During the early 1920s, blues and jazz music became increasingly popular. For several musicians, Houston acted as a hub where they could congregate and perform for paying audiences. As more musicians performed publicly, a viable music scene coalesced within the city.²

Like other U.S. cities, Houston witnessed the emerging Jazz Age, and local African American musicians leveraged this to express their vulnerable perspectives through music. Historian Tiwana Steptoe explained, that they tackled "black sadness and sorrow, black agony and anguish, black heartache and heartbreak without fully succumbing to the numbing effects of such misery—to never allow such misery to have the last word." By expressing their authenticity, these musicians connected with and amplified their community, exercising Black autonomy in a highly polarized society that often diminished their perspectives.³

Local high schools and their initiatives became notable contributors to the flourishing Houston Jazz Age. Jack Yates, Phillis Wheatley, and Booker T. Washington High Schools provided aspiring African American musicians with a formal musical education, tailored to their needs and interests. Through a proper structure, young musicians could, noted historian Bernadette Pruitt, "study music, form bands, invest in instruments and achieve success in their careers." These musicians were so well trained, that during the 1930s, venues, such as local ballrooms and theaters, hired them



Beginning with Charles B. Johnson, the Johnson family has become intertwined with Yates High School history across three generations teaching at Yates and in HISD.

Photo courtesy of Conrad O. Johnson Collection, African American Research Center, Houston Public Library.

to perform for the same audiences entertained by professional musicians.⁴

Yates High School's music programs demonstrated their capacity to support emerging talent and produced a significant number of the young performers in those spaces. As a cornerstone of Houston music education for African American students, these programs brought out the best in students, faculty, and alumni. Assessing the school's band, choir, and orchestra programs offers a nuanced understanding of Yates's history and the continuity of music education in Houston.

Dr. Charles B. Johnson: The Beginning of Jack Yates Band

In 1931, five years after Yates High School proudly opened its doors, the school established its band program led by Charles B. Johnson. In its first year, the band program included thirty-six players, a relatively large number for a new program. A practicing dentist by profession, Dr. Johnson was also an accomplished trumpet player, flutist, and vocalist who wrote the song, "Houston Is A Grand Old Town." Dr. Johnson's teachings were directly attributed to his personal morals and the dynamic of his family, who "always had a big heart, so there was always room for one more plate at the table." During his time at Yates, Dr. Johnson "instilled in young people a love of jazz, and the determination to become good musicians, good students, and good human beings," a sentiment carried forward by several of his students, including his own son, Conrad O. "Prof" Johnson.⁵

The Johnson family and their legacy were critical to Yates High School's success. Dr. Johnson was the first of three generations of family members who taught at Yates and in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), and two generations who graduated from the school. Not only did Johnson's son follow in his footsteps as a band director at Yates, but Dr. Johnson's daughter, Sue Tankersley,

taught in HISD for over thirty years. And his grandson, Dr. Ronald Johnson, became the school's principal in 1990. By 1991, the Johnson family had amassed over 100 years of service to HISD and more than 150 years of service to the Houston community.⁶

From his earliest days at Yates, Dr. Johnson and his teachings fostered a sense of community and motivation that subsequent band teachers naturally embraced, carrying the Yates musical spirit forward in their instruction. In 1941, the Yates Band, led by director Abner Jones, received several compliments from *The Lion* yearbook staff for their programs and two concerts. *The Lion* also commended Jones for his "untiring and faithful efforts in working with the members."⁷

In 1941, Prof Johnson left his professional career as a renowned jazz saxophonist and composer to become a music educator. In 1945, he led Jack Yates Band and served as director until 1947. Prof consistently credited his success to his father and the way his father had trained him. Dr. Johnson inspired his son, "playing the flute at home" after work and leading Prof to realize that "he wanted to become a musician."⁸

A 1933 graduate of Yates High School, Prof Johnson developed a unique versatility as a band leader and a band member during his secondary schooling, and, as band director, he used his talents to mentor his students. Paralleling his father's efforts, Johnson helped his own students become successful jazz musicians. Even though much of Johnson's success has been centered around his work at Kashmere High School and its renowned jazz band, Johnson's core foundation in teaching and leading music began during his time as a student at Yates.

This transition from secondary student to influential musician was not exclusive to Johnson. For example, Yates alumnus and saxophonist Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson developed his musical talents as a Yates student and traveled with Chester Boone's Territory Bands in the summer, before making his first professional recordings in the early 1940s.⁹ The successes demonstrate that Yates musicians were dedicated to making their musicianship known and, ultimately, fostering a strong community amongst the future generations of musicians.



Yates music offerings represented the community's heritage. The Yates Glee Club rapidly expanded to include three groups that performed at school and area events.

Photo courtesy of *The Lion*, 1949.

The Development of the Choir and Orchestra Programs

As the Yates band gained notoriety, other music programs grew along with it. Even though Glee Clubs are often overlooked, Yates High School's Glee Club became a critical element of the music program's structure. Initially founded in the 1930s, the Yates Glee Club became more formalized in the 1940s. In 1941, director Hazel Lewis helped foster a community among African American students interested in the vocal arts. These students sang at school assemblies and were known for their "beautiful operettas."¹⁰

By 1949, the Glee Club had split into three groups: Junior Glee Club, A Capella Choir, and Senior Glee Club.¹¹ As interest in the vocal arts increased, several students used the Glee Club to artistically express themselves, connect with their Third Ward community, and showcase their pride in their roots despite living in a segregated society. Glee Club students built school spirit by singing short, yet patriotic songs, and preserved their cultural heritage through engaging in spiritual and jazz music styles. Like Jack Yates Band, the vocal program was a testament to the ongoing resilience and endurance of the Black community.

The talent and capacity of Yates High School's amateur singers led them to succeed beyond the classroom. In 1953, the choir program significantly expanded. Three groups operated under Hazel Lewis's direction: Chorus II, the Glee Club, and the A Capella Choir.¹² Now senior choral groups, they performed in the annual operetta, which the neighborhood and the city of Houston had enjoyed since 1944.

Mrs. G. O'Neal Duke directed another musical group, the Treble Clef Choral Club during the 1950s. Much like the senior choral groups, the Treble Clef Choral Club heavily emphasized performance. The group performed for junior school assemblies and participated in dance compositions, including one named "Jubilation."¹³ By having two choir directors, Yates High School could accommodate the growing school population and, as a result, garner a high degree of interest.

Like Dr. Charles Johnson and Prof Johnson, Lewis left a significant impact on



Under choir directors Hazel Lewis, left, and Mrs. G. O'Neal Duke, the Yates choir program significantly expanded, prioritizing greatness. The A Capella Choir often saw alumni return to sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" during the holidays.

Photo courtesy of *The Lion*, 1953.

dedication and "devotion to duty and untiring efforts toward the development of musical talent." This, in turn, boosted her former and current students' esteem and confidence when navigating the real world.¹⁴

Yates High School moved to a new building at 3703 Sampson Street in September of 1958 to relieve overcrowding, and Lewis's legacy continued at the new location.¹⁵ Yates's choir programs performed at several assemblies and events, strengthening Yates's music programs.

During the Jim-Crow Era, these programs heavily focused on asserting Black autonomy in a predominantly white society. However, with school desegregation beginning in

the 1960s, music programs emphasized the expansion of individual's world views as part of their education, as opposed to amplifying Black voices. In the midst of this process, Yates wanted its students to acclimate to the surrounding society. The Fine Arts Department offered subjects that larger curricula often overlooked, which led to growth of the Yates band and choir programs. The 1977 yearbook pages for the Fine Arts Department that housed the Yates music programs stated that individuals at the time were "just not art or music oriented." It indicated, however, "We here at Yates try to cultivate our students for them to have a well rounded education when they leave us to go on to bigger and better things."¹⁶

The Fine Arts Department continued its expansion during the 1980s. In 1983, the school renamed the band, the Yates Marching Motion Band. From the early 1980s to the late 1990s, Yates High School



One of Yates's notable music alumni, Johnny Nash, had numerous hit records before scoring a number one hit on Billboard with "I Can See Clearly Now," which sold over a million records. Also appearing in films, he became known as America's "first Black teen idol."

Photo courtesy of Joda Records and Wikimedia Commons.

her students. She instilled in them "the desire to achieve greatness" and helped mold them into national personalities, some of whom include famous recording artist Johnny Nash. An "early promoter of reggae," Johnny Nash's successes included releasing several hit albums and being named America's "first Black teen idol" by several news outlets. Opera and theater star and 1949 alumna Barbara Webb was also a musical forerunner performing in productions around the world, including in *Porgy and Bess*. Year after year, Lewis's former students returned at Christmas time to sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," with the Glee Club and A Capella Choir. Her former students' consistent return attested to Hazel Lewis's



Will Henry Bennett, right, led the music programs at Yates for twenty-seven years, bringing notoriety to its numerous music ensembles and the school.

Photo courtesy of
the Houston History
Research Center,
RGD0013-73-5-164-32.

expanded its impact by participating in several competitions. One of two Houston high school bands to participate in the first annual Mobile Bowl in Mobile, Alabama, the band won three consecutive first place awards in the Mobile Mardi Gras Parade within the area. The band's successes were a direct reflection of the hard work that earlier directors had put into the program when playing at events.¹⁷ The band's performances during the 1990s were a direct reflection of their earlier legacy. From once playing at events, such as the Turkey Day Classic Games against Wheatley High School from 1942 to 1966, to now competing at festivals, the marching band added another layer of diversity in the band program and within Yates's full music program.

The Lion acknowledged the orchestra program during the early 1940s, but it received much more recognition from a broader audience during the late 1950s to early 1970s. First named Yates Orchestra in 1941, it became the Yates Concert Orchestra by the late 1950s. Led by William Henry Bennett during the late 1950s, the Yates Concert Orchestra collaborated with other groups, such as the Texas Southern University Faculty Trio.¹⁸

Given that they were performing with upper-level faculty and received recognition in the local newspapers, the Yates Concert Orchestra contributed significantly to the reputation of Yates's music programs. By the late 1970s, it became Yates Symphony Orchestra.¹⁹ The orchestra's sixty-year legacy, like that of the band and choir, provided participating students unique opportunities to build on their musicianship and perform with others within the Third Ward community until the orchestra was dismantled in the early 2000s.

In 2018, Yates High School moved to a new state-of-the-art facility at 3650 Alabama that included a new fine arts performance wing and auditorium. Even though the orchestra has yet to be revived, Jack Yates Marching Motion Band took advantage of these developments to make some powerful strides. Recently, two Jack Yates Marching Motion

Band members participated in the 2025 Honda Battle of the Bands. An annual HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) band showcase, the event spotlights talented players, who represent the best of "HBCU tradition and culture."²⁰ Given that this showcase is typically for collegiate level bands, the idea of two Yates students being selected to perform, demonstrates the power of the music cultivated within the high school's walls. This parallels the many Yates band students who performed at jazz clubs during the 1930s, almost a century before.

Overall, since 1926, the music programs at Yates High School have undergone significant development. Although much of the attention has been on the band program, understanding the history of the choir and orchestra program shows the diversity of music education. Without the efforts of dedicated mentors, the resilience of Houston's African American community, and the hard work and dedication that student musicians put into their craft, these music programs would not have succeeded, and Houston's jazz and blues musical culture would not be as rich as it is today.

The music programs have stood the test of time and demonstrate this rich legacy of cultural preservation, artistic resilience, and educational opportunity for the African American community in the Third Ward. Despite the obstacles of the Jim Crow Era and the isolating effects of segregation, the band, choral, and orchestra programs contributed to the musical culture that defined, and continue to define, Houston. At the centennial, they stand as, and will remain, a true musical legacy. 🇺🇸

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The Yates Marching Motion Band performs at homecoming in 2018, the same year the school opened a new state-of-the-art facility. Students in the program strive for excellence, with two students recently participating in collegiate level marching events.

Photo courtesy of 2C2K Photography and Flickr.



Yates Alumni in the Spotlight

By Ana C. Parker and A'Viyon Robinson

From its founding in 1926, Jack Yates High School in Houston, Texas, has seen thousands of students enter its doors and walk its storied halls, going on to graduate in pursuit of varied lives and careers. Of these graduates, many have gone on to be notable figures, and a host of other

Yates alumni have distinguished themselves across the fields of entertainment, education, law, broadcasting, and civic activism, to name a few. The people listed here, and those who appear in other articles throughout this issue, are but a small sample of the distinguished Yates Lions. **HH**



Hobart Taylor Jr. (1920-1981) graduated from Yates in 1936 and went on to earn BA and MA degrees before receiving his JD from the University of Michigan in 1943. He and his father supported Lyndon Johnson, and in 1961, President Kennedy appointed Taylor special counsel to the President's Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, where he is credited with coining the phrase, "affirmative action."¹

Photo courtesy of Texas History Collection, Portal to Texas History, [ark:/67531/metapht1741](https://www.texas.gov/ark:/67531/metapht1741).

Ana C. Parker is an art and education major at the University of Houston with plans to teach art upon graduation. She is in her second year interning at *Houston History* magazine.

A'Viyon Robinson is a third-year history student at the University of Houston. As a native Houstonian, her interests include community enrichment and preservation, as well as archiving and actuating the oral histories of the city's more marginalized communities.



Jewel Brown (1937-2024) began singing at age nine, and by twelve years old was singing at the Eldorado Ballroom in Third Ward, and with her brother's band in Galveston. Brown toured the world performing with Louis Armstrong throughout the 1960s and returned to performing in the 2000s. Here she sings "en spectacle avec Louis Armstrong à la Place des Nations," on September 8, 1968.²

Photo by Gordon Beck, courtesy of Archives de la Ville de Montréal and Flickr.



Third Ward native **Carroll Parrott Blue** (1943-2019) graduated from Yates in 1960, feeling the full effects of the new school leadership and desegregation. Blue became a noted documentary filmmaker giving voice to people of color and joining the L.A. Rebellion film movement calling for an end to discrimination in the industry. Her book, *The Dawn at My Back: A Memoir of a Black Texas Upbringing*, chronicles life in Third Ward under Jim Crow and the challenges of breaking away from its legacy.³

Photo courtesy of the University of Houston.



Born in Austin in 1948, **Michelle Barnes** and her family moved to Houston in 1951 where she attended and graduated from Yates High School in 1966. She went on to become an alumnus of the University of Houston in 1970. Barnes is a Houston-based artist, educator and arts administrator, known for her role as co-founder and executive director of The Community Artists' collective.⁴

Photo courtesy of Black Lunch Table and Wikimedia Commons.

Yates



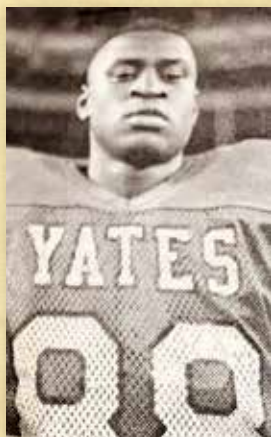
Carolyn Evans-Shabazz, Ed.D., graduated from Yates in 1972. A third generation educator, she earned degrees from Spellman and Texas Southern University and served as teacher and Lead Evaluation Specialist with HISD until she retired in 2009. An active member of the NAACP, she became the first African American woman to head the Houston Community College board, where she worked to make education more accessible. Since 2020, she has served as the Houston City Council Member for District D, where she prioritizes education, quality of life, and providing resources and information to community members.

Photo courtesy of Carolyn Evans-Shabazz.



Majorettes and sisters **Phylicia (now Rashad)** and **Debbie Allen** do "The Java" during a halftime show in 1965. Both sisters went on to award-winning careers in television, stage, and film. Both have also been actively engaged in education.⁵

Photo courtesy of *The Lion* yearbook, 1966.



George Floyd, born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, attended Jack Yates High School where he played on the 1992 District 5A Championship football team. After Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police in 2020, members of the Yates community gathered at the school for a memorial service to honor his life and speak out against injustice.

Photos courtesy of the *The Lion*, 1993, and Wikimedia Commons, 2C2K Photography.

Alumni



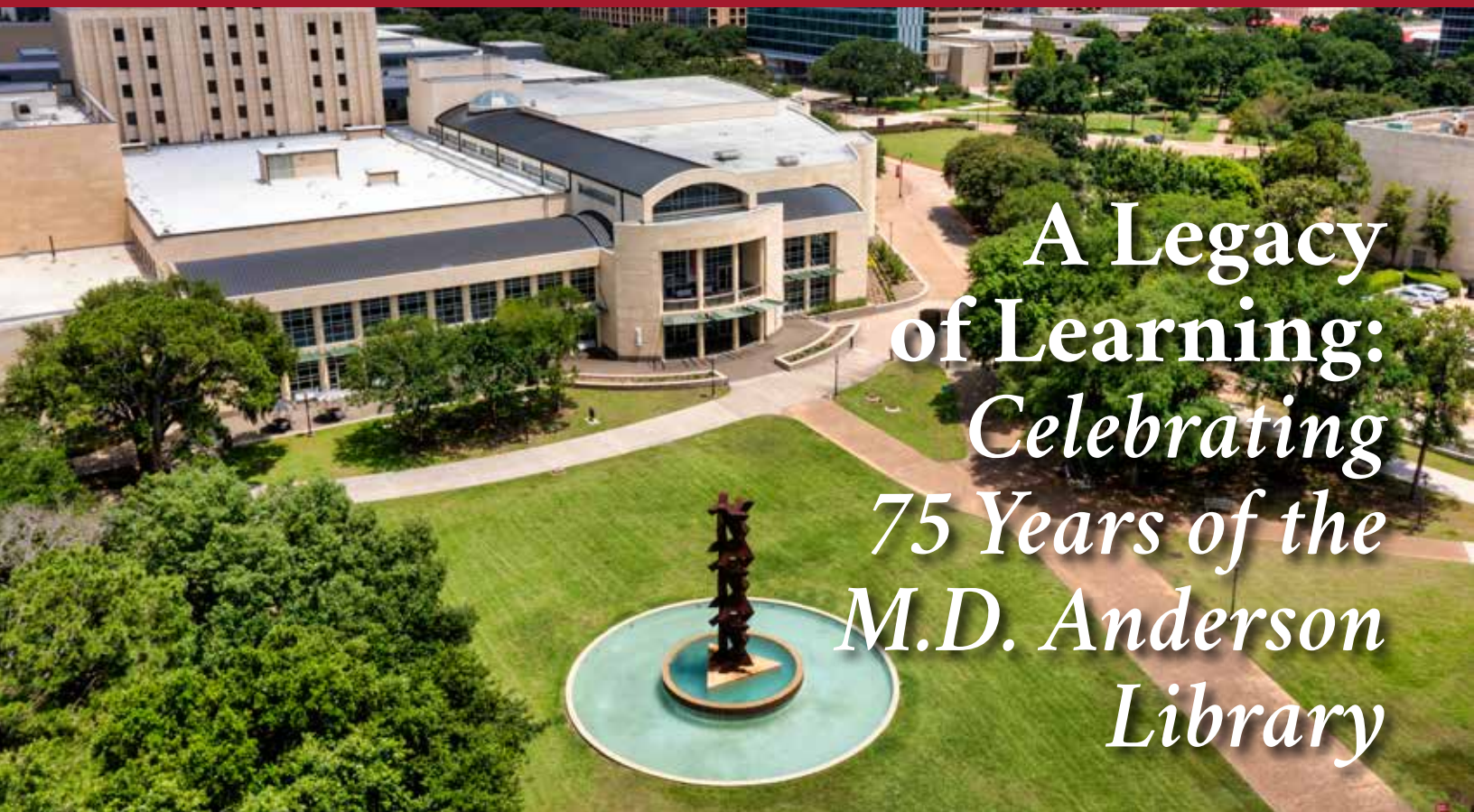
A 1979 Yates graduate, **Garnet Coleman** earned his BA at the University of St. Thomas and completed Harvard University's Senior Executive Program for State and Local Government. He served as a Texas state representative from 1991 to 2022, when health issues forced him to retire. He has fought against illegal drugs and championed education, health reform, housing, the arts, and protection from gentrification.⁶

Photo courtesy of Tipowell0403 and Wikimedia Commons.



In 2023, HISD named 2002 Yates graduate and former teacher, **Stephanie Square** as the school's principal. The Houston native and daughter of Nicaraguan immigrants grew up in Cuney Homes and played six sports at Yates. Currently, Yates is one of 85 HISD schools in the New Education System (NES) to turn around underperforming campuses. Having served the previous six years as principal of an A-rated school, Square plans to build "a culture of excellence" to lead Yates into the future.⁷

Photo courtesy of Houston Independents School District.



A Legacy of Learning: Celebrating 75 Years of the M.D. Anderson Library

For three quarters of a century, the M.D. Anderson Library has stood as a beacon of learning and a gathering place that unites the campus community.

Photo courtesy of University of Houston.

By Lexi Gaddis

The M.D. Anderson Library can be found at the heart of the University of Houston (UH) campus, filled with students tucked into study rooms, fingers typing on keyboards, and textbooks stacked up beside iced coffees. For UH students, the library is more than a place to check out books or study for exams; it is a home away from home and a place that has witnessed generations of growth. As M.D. Anderson Library celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary in April 2026, it remains at the center of campus life, evolving with each new class of Coogs who pass through its doors. Every student brings new ideas and ways of learning while continuing to rely on the same quiet spaces and sense of focus that the library provides. M.D. Anderson Library has become a hub for collaboration, creativity, and community. From late-night group study sessions to relaxing breaks in between classes, the library offers students a place where they can grow academically and personally. With resources like peer mentoring in information literacy, equipment lending, and research workshops, the library is dedicated to student success, a commitment that can be traced back to the library's humble beginnings.

The University of Houston was founded in 1927 as Houston Junior College; its original library collection

was housed at San Jacinto High School on Holman Street, where the classes met. Librarian Ruth S. Wikoff fostered the school's small collection. With Wikoff's leadership, resourcefulness, and vision for the library, the collection grew even as the college faced constraints in space and funding.¹ As the



Classes for Houston Junior College and University of Houston originally met at San Jacinto High School, circa 1935.

All photos courtesy of University of Houston Libraries, unless otherwise noted.



The \$2.7 million Blue Wing added to the M.D. Anderson Library in 1968 included three-story structures on either side for storage, but increasing student enrollment soon demanded a larger facility.

college evolved, so did its physical space. The college moved from San Jacinto High School to temporary facilities until 1939 when the university moved to its permanent home on the current campus and into the newly built Roy G. Cullen Building, which was its first building.

As UH transitioned from a junior college to a university, the need for a dedicated and larger library space arose. That need grew exponentially after World War II and passage of the G.I. Bill, with enrollment going from 2,720 in fall of 1944 to 10,028 by 1946. The makeshift collections scattered around campus could no longer support the growing number of students, classes, and faculty. The university needed more than shelves of books; it needed a dedicated space for students to do research and have a sense of community. This turning point for UH came in 1946 when the M.D. Anderson Foundation awarded the university a \$1.5 million grant to build a permanent library. This gift marked a pivotal moment for UH as both a donation and an endorsement of the university's future.²

Houston architectural firm, Staub, Rather, and Howze, designed the building after classical architecture that conveyed a sense of academic prestige. The design featured grand windows and elegant columns, meant to evoke the value of knowledge. One striking feature along the building's exterior was the engraved names of great thinkers and writers, like da Vinci, Moses, Galileo, Franklin, Tolstoy, and Freud. The library officially opened its doors on Christmas Eve in 1950, housing over 56,000 volumes. With the creation of the M.D. Anderson Library, UH finally had a space worthy of its academic aspirations.³

As the university grew in size, so did the library, adapting to meet the demands of a larger student body and rapidly progressing academic landscape. The first major expansion came in 1968, when the university constructed an eight-story addition known as the Blue Wing behind the original limestone building. Designed to relieve crowding and

accommodate a growing collection, the tower added many study and storage spaces, while continuing the tradition of inscribing the names of great thinkers along its walls.

By the mid 1970s, it became clear that even the Blue Wing would not have enough space to meet the library's needs. Enrollment surpassed 27,000 in 1971, and the university commissioned alumnus Kenneth Bentsen to design a three-phase expansion plan.⁴ The first phase completed was the five-story Brown Wing, finished in 1978. This addition not only increased capacity but also provided specialized spaces such as the George R. Brown Room, dedicated in 1981 as a memorial to the USS *Houston* and was also used for events, exhibits, and gatherings. For two decades the Brown Wing stood as the library's only major expansion, with the interior being continually reconfigured to meet the changing needs of the students and librarians it housed.

Another era of growth came in 2004 with a \$20 million renovation that nearly doubled the library's size.⁵ The project added the Gold Wing and the John O'Quinn Atrium, creating a central gathering space filled with natural light and student activity. The renovation also brought to fruition the idea of what a modern library should offer. In addition to study carrels, the building now included large computer labs, collaborative study areas, and a twenty-four-hour lounge. The later addition of the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Pavilion in honor of 1996 UH Alumni Association Distinguished Alumnus Elizabeth Dennis Rockwell further connected the library's architecture to its mission of celebrating knowledge.

Over the years, the library has proven it is more than a collection of books; it is a space where art, culture, learning, and identity converge. One striking example of this is *A Comma, A* by artist Jim Sanborn, a light sculpture installed

A, Comma, A (2003 bronze) by Jim Sanborn stands outside the library where it projects passages from literature in multiple languages, just as those found in the library.

Photo by Rick Gardner, courtesy of Public Art University of Houston System.





Brown fox squirrels are ubiquitous on campus, much to the delight of students who enjoy watching and feeding them. However, sighting this white-tailed gray squirrel before a test was believed to bring good luck – earning him a permanent place on display in Special Collections.

at the entrance to the library.⁶ This piece of art projects passages of literature in multiple languages across the building's facade when lit from within at night. The piece symbolizes the importance of language, storytelling, and the preservation of knowledge, which is what the library is about. Inside the library, its collections extend beyond English texts to encompass works that reflect Houston's diverse population. By making global literature accessible, the library provides a platform for cultural dialogue and the preservation of linguistic traditions that are often at risk of being forgotten. The addition of the Rockwell Pavilion strengthens this role. As a flexible event space, it hosts lectures, author talks, exhibits, and gatherings. With this, the library transcends its function as a place for study; it stands as a beacon of cultural exchange and intellectual growth in keeping with the University's mission.

By the late twentieth century, the M.D. Anderson Library remained the cornerstone of knowledge on campus, but its mission was to evolve to meet the demands of an increasingly digital world. One of the most transformative shifts came with the migration from the traditional card catalog to an electronic catalog system—a monumental task that redefined how students interact with information. Building on this progress, the library launched its Digital Library, now known as UH Digital Collections, to preserve and share rare materials online. This advancement paved the way for the Digital Research Commons, which provides tools and expertise for projects involving data visualization, text mining, and digital archiving.⁷

As fields of study expanded, the library's Special Collections also grew to preserve the university's unique history as well as Houston's diverse cultural legacy. The University Archives, formally established in 1996, began under the direction of its first archivist, Andrea Hough, who recognized the importance of preserving the institution's history for future generations.⁸ These archives today house rare materials, photographs, and documents that trace the growth of UH. Special Collections even houses the special

taxidermized "white-tailed squirrel" that is on display in the Reading Room. Legend has it that when the squirrel was alive and frolicking around campus, students would have good luck on their exams when they spotted the squirrel.

Among the most significant holdings within the University Archives are the President's Office Records, which document the decisions and milestones of UH leadership; the Daily Cougar Archives, chronicling decades of student journalism and campus dialogue; and the Frontier Fiesta Collection, preserving photographs and other memorabilia from one of the university's most beloved traditions. The UH Buildings and Grounds Collection also provides a vivid look at the physical growth of campus, from its earliest classrooms to the modern skyline that overlooks the university today. Together, these collections ensure that the voices, stories, and achievements of the UH community are preserved for generations to come.⁹

Modernization did not stop at collections. The M.D. Anderson Library evolved into a fully equipped digital ecosystem. Today, technology enhances study rooms featuring screen sharing capabilities, multimedia studio support, podcasting, and video creation. Such updates reflect the ongoing mission of the library to meet students where they are with collaboration and creativity as well as by offering technology that advances student access. The real legacy of M.D. Anderson Library lies not in its architecture or its collections but in the generations of students it has touched.

Guided from its earliest days by individuals committed to access, equity, and scholarship, the library has grown from a small collection at Houston Junior College developed through the ceaseless labor of Ruth S. Wikoff. Wikoff led the library from 1933 until her retirement in 1973 and forged the core of what developed into one of Houston's most crucial educational resources. Additionally, trailblazer Dr. Charles D. Churchwell, who started on September 1, 1967, became the assistant director for Public Services of the library and the first African American hired at the University of Houston in a professional status.¹⁰ His arrival marked an



Labeled the "Greatest College Show on Earth," Frontier Fiesta began in 1940 with theatrical and musical performances, a cook-off, carnival booths, contests, and concessions. Suspended for World War II and again in 1960, it was reinstated in 1992 and remains a valued campus tradition.



Ruth Wikoff, center, led the library for forty years, taking it from a relatively small selection of books to a critical educational resource for the university and the Houston community.

important moment in the university's journey toward inclusivity and representation, making certain that the library remained a place where all voices could be heard and valued.

By the time the 1,000,000th volume was added to the collection in 1977, as part of the dedication ceremonies for the John H. Freeman Wing (now known as the Brown Wing), the library had grown far beyond its humble beginnings.¹¹ The collection symbolized the tireless dedication of those who had built and preserved it. Beyond the physical expansions, the library has long played a role in cultivating community and scholarship. The Friends of the Library organization, once one of the university's most influential support groups, was instrumental in growing the collection for decades by hosting events, lectures, and fundraisers that connected donors, scholars, and students. These gatherings transcended the many volumes; they celebrated the spirit of discovery that defines UH.

The library has also been the place that marked many personal milestones from students pulling all-nighters before exams to faculty presenting research that shaped their fields and alumni returning to the study spots that once defined their college years. Every generation has its own version of M.D. Anderson Library, yet each shares the same memory, the hums of collaboration, the quiet focus, and the comfort of belonging. Whether it be hosting workshops, student exhibitions, or research, the library continues to be a gathering place that unites UH—where new students find their rhythm, where ideas take root, and where the past and present can coexist in harmony.

As M.D. Anderson Library turns seventy-five, it stands not as a relic of the past but as a blueprint for the future of learning. The library's vision for its next chapter centers on a journey of reinvention. Dean Christina H. Gola is leading

a big idea known as the Reimagined Library that will drive the development of modern, inspiring spaces designed to meet the needs of students, faculty, and scholars.¹² Student and faculty success depends on access to modern, flexible spaces for studying and collaboration. Thus, M.D. Anderson Library has added new, contemporary furniture to floors 1, 7, and 8. Inspired by student feedback reflecting preferences for a variety of study seating options and consistent with the Reimagined Library vision, the space refresh began in September 2024 with floor 1. There students can choose from relaxed, counter-height, and laptop-friendly, soft seating. More recently, the library added 160 seats to floors 7 and 8, including single-user carrels and rounded pods, as well as tables with privacy screens. Students and researchers can enjoy inspiring views of the university and the city from these floors.

Amidst the renovation, the heart of the library remains the same as a place where students come to find out who they are, and where the opening of a laptop or a book could mean a world of possibilities. In many ways, the story of M.D. Anderson Library mirrors the story of the University of Houston itself: one of grit, resilience, and transformation. From its humble beginnings as a borrowed room in a high school to its current status as an information and learning hub, the library's journey proves what can be achieved when vision meets perseverance.

With this in mind the library looks toward its next chapter, carrying forward the legacy of those who have built it: Ruth Wikoff's resolve, Dr. Churchwell's pioneering spirit, and the countless students who have called the library their second home. M.D. Anderson Library stands ready to welcome the next generation of Coogs in continuing its mission of knowledge preservation, inspiring discovery, and connecting the past with the possibilities of tomorrow. **HH**

Lexi Gaddis is a marketing communications assistant at M.D. Anderson Library who studies marketing and entrepreneurship at the University of Houston, with a passion for innovation, storytelling, and highlighting student experiences that shape campus life. She has worked at the library since her freshman year, is part of the Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship, and recently accepted a summer internship at Forthea.



The new Reimagined Library spaces on the seventh and eighth floor of the Blue Wing quickly became a hit with students seeking to collaborate on research projects.

Hubert Roussel: “Extra, Extra. Read All About It!”

By Don Looser

Just a scant memory ago is the era when legendary journalist and television reporter Walter Cronkite began his career in 1932 as a high school cub reporter for the *Houston Post*.¹ Before the advent of television, the newspaper was the primary purveyor of daily information and the chief molder of public opinion. Only newspapers had the multiple layers of news journalists, syndicated columnists, arts critics, fashion editors, society reporters, gossip columnists, and sports writers to compile a comprehensive, qualitative product on a rigid daily timetable. Multiple updated daily editions kept the news current. The newspaper was the heartbeat of the city.

In downtown Houston, news runners for the *Houston Press* raced to beat the 2:00 p.m. deadline for the evening edition to best the *Houston Chronicle*. Cronkite described the *Post* city room “littered with the wadded remains of ... rejected leads. The air hung heavy with smoke. The din was frightful as the deadline approached and typewriters *clacked*, linotypes *clinked*, and telephones *clanged*.”² Houston was blessed with a wealth of spectacular writers including O. Henry, Hubert Roussel, George Fuermann, Leon Hale, and future novelists David Westheimer (*Von Ryan’s Express*), Larry McMurtry (*Lonesome Dove*), and William Broyles (*Apollo 13*).

Early in the twentieth century, Houston boasted three newspapers with distinctive personalities. The oldest, the *Houston Post*, was founded in 1880 by Gail Borden Johnson.

The legendary *Post* journalist Marcellus E. Foster established the *Houston Chronicle* in 1901. With gains from the Spindletop oil boom, Foster also founded the original *Houston Press* in 1911. The *Chronicle*’s erudite editor Zarko Franks called the pugilistic *Press* “the jazzy old lady of

Texas journalism.” In downtown Houston, one could buy a newspaper on virtually every street corner. The sassy, no-subscription *Press* “tattled, slugged it out with the high and mighty, harassed faith healers, and loved kids and dogs ... She screamed headlines, and never ignored a fight at the Cork Club.” Columnist Wanda Orton observed, “Everyone loved the old *Houston Press*, although not everybody would admit it.”³

The counsel of the *Chronicle*’s scholarly Zarko Franks seemed to permeate local journalism, “Write it tight, but don’t sacrifice the lover’s sigh, the laugh, the tear.” The *Post* boasted the eccentric, Latin-reading, piano-playing philologist Hubert Mewhinney. The *Houston Press* featured Sig Byrd’s column “The Stroller” that lent dark, Runyon-like prose about Houston’s inner-city underbelly. *Press* readers also relished Maxine Mesinger’s column “She Snoops to Conquer” with her “showbiz lingo” reports of *swankiendas* and *playcations*. Moreover, the

cultural scene was fostered by a cadre of gifted journalists—Wille Hutcheson, Ina Gillespie, and Hubert Roussel.⁴

In the period from 1928 to 1966, Hubert Roussel was the man whose contribution was so monumental that it virtually



The *Houston Gargoyle* publication was “fondly remembered for its enlivening of the local scene.” This cover is from vol. 3, no. 9, March 2, 1930. Photo courtesy of the Houston History Research Center, Digital Archives, Houston Public Library, bk0045-272b.

defied measurement. Roussel was born in 1897 in Houston after his parents left behind the seat of their French ancestry in Louisiana. He was educated in New York City and served on several magazine staffs there, absorbing the city's literary style. He returned to Houston in 1928 as an associate editor of *The Houston Gargoyle* magazine, successfully modeled after the sophisticated *The New Yorker*.⁵ Much of his early journalistic attention focused on the lively Houston Little Theatre where his wife, Dewey, was president. Roussel then worked for the *Houston Press* from 1932 to 1937 and later served with "unchallenged distinction" as critic of music and drama at the *Post* from 1937 to 1966.

For Roussel, culture was a profession. He became a legend among Houston journalists for his acerbic wit, his bold advocacy for cultural progress, and his eloquent writing. Roussel's colleague George Fuermann described him as a "brilliant, opinionated, wispish, crotchety jack-of-all-critics." Fuermann viewed Roussel as "a generally dour gentleman whose other talents included one of the most facile journalistic styles in the South and a temperament that was never introduced to indecision." Novelist David Westheimer wrote, "He was a brilliant critic of films, the stage, ballet and music... wise without being smug, incisive and witty, with never a wrong or wasteful word." Roussel's wit could pen such an alliterative theater description as "rosy, ribald, and raffish," then in turn summarize a concert by the Houston Symphony guest conductor Modest Alloo as "Much Alloo about Nothing." After a concert by the Metropolitan Opera diva Helen Traubel, Roussel lamented, "Nobody knows the Traubel I've Seen."⁶

During most of his career, Roussel reviewed virtually every downtown performance. His prickly columns appeared promptly in the paper the next morning. Historian Walter Rundell, Jr. observed, "To a large extent, the Houston audience was educated by the columns of Hubert Roussel. The

Hubert Roussel.

Photo courtesy of the Alley Theatre, Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library, 792.0976414 A435.



success of great music in Houston must take into account his *signal* contribution." On days when there was no concert, his concert reviews frequently took the form of imaginary conversations with Fleecie, the "goddess of the cigar counter," in the Rice Hotel lobby. Fleecie represented what Roussel thought the average concertgoer might have felt about the last night's program. In one review concerning contemporary repertoire, Fleecie reported that her friend said the orchestra didn't play anything familiar. The more she heard, "the more she felt dizzy inside, like listening to Liberace, but worse."⁷

Roussel's wit was sharp and to the point. After a production of *Faust* in which theatrical flash powder mistakenly ignited Faust instead of Mephistopheles, Roussel labeled it "A Victory for Satan." He once admonished, "You have to play a symphony to be one," and later, "This reporter has never encountered a rendition of any work that sounded *less* like Beethoven wrote it." Roussel observed that one Alley Theatre production "... could have left no one doubtful of its hold on insignificance." Moreover, he chronicled what he labeled as André Previn's "temperamental afflatus."⁸

Leon Hale recalled, "The *Post* had truly literate people like Donald Barthelme and Hubert Roussel. Unknown to him, I became Roussel's student. I studied every sentence he wrote. I thought it so wonderful he could compose those soaring reviews of symphony concerts and, in the next breath, produce one of his light pieces on Fleecie. For me, a cup of coffee with people like that was a continuing education." David Westheimer remembered, "Roussel was my first boss. From my first day he taught me how to write a story— 'just put one little word after the other.'" What appeared to be Roussel's facile gift of expression, however, was the result of his uncompromising refinement. Colleagues reported that Roussel's wastebasket was always full of discarded versions of his prose. "His columns were painfully wrought but seemed effortless." Donald Barthelme recalled, "When 'Mr.' Roussel wasn't happy with [an associate's] article, he'd punch a buzzer on his desk summoning George Christian or me for a harsh scolding." So intense was his commitment to language that he once filed off the comma key on the typewriter of an assistant whom he accused of its overuse.⁹

Roussel's praise was equally powerful. He could glorify with the headline, "Stokowski Opens Season with Triumph"



Dewey Roussel, left center, helped establish the Houston Stage Canteen, "a cabaret for enlisted service personnel in uniform" (1942-1946) located in the former Auditorium Hotel, now The Lancaster. Also pictured: actress Fay Bainter, center; Hubert Roussel, far right; and Dr. Reginald Platt at left.

Photo courtesy of Michaelene "Miki" Lusk Norton.

his years and many reviews in his 1972 book, *The Houston Symphony Orchestra, 1913-1971*. However, Roussel's vast writings on theater, ballet, and visiting artists are preserved only in his daily columns. Carl Cunningham, Roussel's successor at the *Post*, observed "... his book is a beautifully written book, flowing with simple dignity, side-splitting humor and memorable touches of sadness ... Roussel the critic stands plainly and honestly in the shadow of Roussel the historian."²⁰ Cunningham has continued to document the city's artistic journey with his three additional Houston cultural histories in the *Rousselian* tradition.

Hubert Roussel arguably had a more profound influence on Houston's cultural destiny than any other subsequent individual. His daily columns recorded in virtual detail the history of Houston's cultural life from the 1930s to the 1960s. Remarkably, only thirty-five years had elapsed between the Houston Symphony's 1931 rebirth and the opening of Jones Hall in 1966. Roussel's retirement marked the culmination of Houston's years of struggle toward musical maturity—just as the opening of Jones Hall heralded the dawn of a period of cultural abundance. With the power of his press, Roussel advanced a path based on civic pride. He led elected officials, culture managers, and corporate executives to respond to his vision for greatness.

Hubert Roussel died on May 11, 1980, at the age of eighty-two. In tribute to Roussel the man, David Westheimer shared, "There never was a gentler, more sensitive friend or more loyal colleague."²¹ As an Army veteran from World War I, Roussel was buried in the Houston National Cemetery. His tombstone reads simply, "Pvt. US Army." In tribute to this extraordinary citizen of Houston, Roussel's honorary pallbearers included future President George H. W. Bush, Lt. Governor William P. Hobby Jr., General Maurice Hirsch, future Secretary of State James Baker III, George Fuermann, David Westheimer, and Walter Cronkite.



Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo
Program, 1942-43,
with cover by famed
Broadway designer
Boris Aronson.

Photo courtesy of
Don Looser.



Ernst Hoffmann, 1955.

Photo courtesy of the Indiana University Archives.

* * * * *

In the 1960s, as television news coverage morphed from the rich treasure of written journalism such as Roussel's, the United States became informed by such television giants as David Brinkley, Barbara Walters, and Tom Brokaw. Instant satellite reporting, sound bites, and video recordings replaced the more extended style of *written* journalism that preceded the days of television news. The news, now, was to be *viewed*. None other than England's Prince Phillip Montbatten keenly observed, "Whatever they print is bound to be out of date."²²

With the advent of television and social media, the Pew Research Center reported that newspaper jobs nationwide declined from 71,000 to 31,000 positions. Most newspapers did not survive. Between 2005 and 2021, some 2,200 news dailies across America went out of business. Many of the rest cut local reporters and news coverage, shrank the paper's size, dismissed feature writers, or stopped print editions.²³ In Houston, both the *Houston Press* and the *Houston Post* ceased publication.²⁴ **HH**

Don Looser, Ph.D., is the author of *Music in Houston: 1930-1970* (<https://digitalcollections.rice.edu/documents/detail/53016>) and *An Act of Providence: A History of Houston Baptist University 1960-2010*. His local history articles have appeared in *The Houston Review: History and Culture of the Gulf Coast* and the *Houston History* magazine. Dr. Looser is the retired Vice President Emeritus at Houston Christian University and a devoted researcher of Houston's cultural history (dlooser@hc.edu).



In 1955, Marian Anderson became the first African American to sing a leading role at the Metropolitan Opera. In 1963, she gave the last concert in Houston's City Auditorium before its demolition.

Photo © Yousuf Karsh, karsh.org.

or “Britannia Rules Again: Barbirolli in Charge.” He could also express his own intimate feelings. After a concert by the regal contralto Marian Anderson, Roussel wrote that she had given him “... the thrill of a lifetime. I cannot explain Marian Anderson. Hearing from the dark woman who stands tall and immobile ... yet throbbing with the passion of human inspiration ... is the most dramatic experience I have had in 30 years of attending the theater.” For Miss Anderson, Edna Saunders broke historical precedent and seated African American guests on the main floor of the City Auditorium. Houston’s mayor sat with Edna Saunders in the African American section. For Anderson’s visits, Saunders personally housed the famed contralto who would enter the Saunders home only through the back door.¹⁰

Roussel’s eloquence was surpassed only by his love for the city of Houston. Roussel leveraged Houston’s civic pride with his oft-voiced rivalry with his Dallas counterpart, critic John Rosenfield of the *Dallas Morning News*. He observed, “Dallas has a burning appreciation of its own virtues and a short view of the undertakings of others.” Roussel pleaded for higher levels of support for the arts from city officials through budget allocations but observed, “The only time I’ve ever known a city official to attend a Houston Symphony

concert was when it took a visit by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor to cause that.”¹¹

Roussel’s personal friendships with the formative philanthropist Ima Hogg, the impresario Edna Saunders, and the oil magnate Hugh Roy Cullen gave wings to his advocacy for cultural advancement. Roussel’s public role as a critic coupled with his personal friendships with the city’s cultural leaders was enhanced in an era when both could be used to great effect. It was as if Roussel had a press pass to the city’s social aristocracy. Roussel mastered the art of creating public pressure for change on those who could afford to pay the cost, while simultaneously conveying to the general audience the cultural sophistication of Houston’s social aristocracy.

Hubert Roussel exercised strong advocacy for his firmly held convictions. It was his position that the development of local talent was a better long-term investment than importing talent for performance. He consistently pressed for better pay and a longer season for the local Symphony musicians. Roussel lamented that the Symphony musicians were the ‘cheapest skilled-labor’ in the Houston job market. In 1940 he wrote, “These people are not relief cases. They have stayed on a diet of canned beans and uneatable big talk. Some players are making only \$50 a month for a limited season, others less.” Symphony musicians at the time were dependent on additional jobs ranging from dance bands and pit orchestras at local movie theaters to farming. Had it not been for such continuous employment provided to a core of professional musicians, it is doubtful that a symphony of any distinction would have developed at this stage in the city’s history. Roussel challenged the idea that support for the arts was the sole responsibility of a handful of wealthy individuals who often considered the arts their personal possession. In 1947 he wrote, “A city becomes great when it learns to invest in things of the spirit for the benefit of its whole citizenship.”¹²



Majestic Theatre Musicians, 1930.

Photo courtesy of Cecil Thompson Studios, Houston Symphony Archives, MS03.0008.

Roussel's campaign to improve or replace the City Auditorium as the principal performance venue was constant. Caruso and Toscanini had performed there and vowed never to return. Conductor Efrem Kurtz "would gladly have dynamited" the facility. Roussel campaigned that the City Auditorium was "less impressive, clean, and comfortable than a shotgun movie theater." He wrote multiple satirical columns about "Sascha," the City Auditorium rodent, who professed a profound predilection for music by Russian composers. City councilman S. A. Starkey suggested that if the City Auditorium rodents could not be eliminated, then they should be required to buy season tickets.¹³ Roussel's career-long campaign for a quality performance venue was finally achieved in 1966 when the City Auditorium was replaced by Jones Hall for the Performing Arts.

Roussel wrote during a period of whirlwind change in Houston's development in art, drama, theater, dance and music. Westheimer affirmed, "Roussel's efforts, as much as anyone's, contributed to the flowering of the Houston Symphony and made [Houston] into a haven for ballet where the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo spent its Christmas breaks."¹⁴ Many Ballet Russe dancers stayed with Houston families during the holidays. From these associations, Roussel's daughter Stephanie studied with Maria Swoboda at the Ballet Russe school and later became active in Houston theater productions. Roussel's younger son Peter enjoyed a career in government including as staff assistant to President Gerald Ford and deputy press secretary to President Ronald Reagan.

Roussel's personal friendship with Houston Symphony board members enabled many of his visions for greatness to find funding. He had Miss Hogg's ear though they did not always agree about Symphony matters. His friendship with Edna Saunders was easy and mutually beneficial. In 1917, Saunders had been given responsibility to book the City Auditorium calendar with cultural events and had maintained a virtual monopoly on guest artists and cultural attractions visiting the city until her death in 1963.¹⁵

Roussel was often a catalyst for progress. In June 1940, he received a letter suggesting a series of summer symphony concerts at Miller Theatre in Hermann Park. Ernst Hoffmann agreed to conduct without pay and to arrange for an ensemble if a donor could be found for a \$1,500 guarantee. When the Houston Symphony declined sponsorship due to budget constraints, Roussel wrote several columns pleading for a donor. Ultimately, an anonymous donor came forward, later revealed to be the entrepreneur N. D. Naman who also helped organize the Houston Philharmonic in 1928.¹⁶

The first free concert was set for August 21, 1940, during the frightening early days of World War II, when Britain began bombing Berlin. Houston had no history of a similar concert undertaking. Attendance was uncertain. "But by 7 p.m., all roads leading into the park were choked with cars. When the concert began, police estimated the audience



Houston City Auditorium, 1928.

Photo by Milton Lawless
courtesy of the Houston History Research Center,
Houston Public Library, MSS 0334-0486.

spread before Miller Theatre to be 15,000. Nothing like it had ever been seen at a concert of orchestral music in Houston," Roussel later reported. Significantly, these Miller Theatre concerts have continued each summer since 1940.¹⁷

At his best, Roussel's eloquent tributes were unsurpassed. Speaking of Stokowski's recording with the Houston Symphony, he wrote of the Hovhaness *Mysterious Mountain*, "The mystery is that it should be so simply, sweetly, innocently lovely in an age that has tried so terribly hard to avoid those impressions in music." In 1955, Roussel wrote an intimate eulogy upon the tragic highway deaths of his revered former Houston Symphony conductor Ernst Hoffmann and his wife. While serving as Symphony conductor, Hoffmann had recruited and often personally housed and fed musicians. He had brought in acclaimed soloists, established student and pops concerts, and initiated radio and military base concerts funded by Hugh Roy Cullen. However, in 1947 the Symphony Executive Committee summarily terminated Hoffmann. Roussel later recalled, "Hoffmann made it an orchestra. His tireless efforts saved the orchestra in the World War II years. He arranged and conducted the first orchestra tour and the first summer concerts without pay. But despite his request, Hoffmann was never invited back to conduct ... The Hoffmanns were good people; they were greatly loved. Now [suddenly] they are gone."¹⁸

Even more poignantly, in 1944 during World War II, on what would have been the twenty-first birthday of his son Cpl. Hubert Roussel, Jr., he shared, "He went to his death for what he loved, as thousands of other typical American boys have done ... In a sense, they were all my boys; I have wept for the others as I have wept for him, but we cannot repay them with our tears. We can only resolve with all the fury and fire in our souls to win the victory for which they died."¹⁹

Hubert Roussel retired in 1966 only months before the grand opening of Jones Hall, a performance theater for which he had lobbied throughout his career. He summarized



Vibrant Colors

The rainbow crosswalks on Westheimer and Taft were installed in 2017 in memory of Alex Hill, a young member of the Montrose community tragically killed in a hit-and-run, and to commemorate the LGBTQ+ community's resilience and contributions in Houston. In 2025, the crosswalks have been removed per a directive issued by Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Department of Transportation for safety and to eliminate political messaging on roadways.¹

Photo courtesy of Jimena Ramirez Loyola.

By Marie Theresa Hernández and Brian Riedel

Most people who know Montrose think of it as a hip community with interesting restaurants and artsy neighborhoods. The University of Houston (UH) photography students from Global Studies and Anthropology were energized by their visits there during the fall of 2024. It felt to them like a place where people of diverse backgrounds lived and worked, and where, at least initially, the students admired the neighborhood's advocacy of its LGBTQ+ community. Because of this, the students felt they could comfortably fit in there.

As we walked the different streets – Westheimer, Lovett, Hopkins, Fairview, and others – the students were awed by the restored Craftsman homes, the eclectic gardens, and the public artwork. Their interactions with neighborhood residents were informative and welcoming, especially with a man named Martin who lives on Hopkins in his meticulously restored century-old cottage.

Yet Montrose is much more than what we saw on our early visits. Its history as a streetcar suburb began in the early twentieth century. In 1912, John Wiley Link constructed the Link-Lee Mansion that became the showcase of the University of St. Thomas, which purchased the home in 1940. Most of the UH students had previously seen the mansion. Nevertheless, its ornate detail mesmerized them, and they photographed its essence with vigor and boundless creativity. They then viewed the many other opulent homes that were part of the neighborhood's early development and learned of the Jim Crow policies that the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision partially restrained, and the federal Fair Housing Act of 1968 abolished.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the developments during the 1960s that established Montrose as a “gay” enclave grew in response to these early policies that kept out so many people, except the servants and groundskeepers – people of color who entered through the mansion's back doors. Many



Wildlife Habitat

Finding a house with a “wildlife habitat” for a garden did not appear unusual. Residents in Montrose feel strongly that their neighborhood’s quality of life is tied to the preservation of fauna in the neighborhood. Recently, residents made an effort to preserve the live oaks in the neighborhood.²

Photo courtesy of Cristina Granados.

Untitled

The metal stairways remind me of New Orleans and appear like they belonged to a grand old house.

Photo courtesy of Muhammad Umar Qadeer.



significant events and locations of the national LGBTQ+ movement (such as the bar Mary’s) were in Montrose.

In the twenty-first century, Montrose has a multi-layered identity. Its history as a home for early twentieth-century, ultra-wealthy, white Houstonians has given way to its reputation as a gay neighborhood in the minds of most Houstonians. What most people see today are the busy streets with offbeat coffee shops and exceptional restaurants. Yet what caught the eye of the students were the brightly painted traffic signal boxes with scenes from the neighborhood and stop signs with stickers announcing everything from records to revolution. 🇺🇸



Hopkins Street

Blue and white tile street signs were used from the 1920s to 1950s for budding Houston development. Today nostalgia has created a demand for people to have street names and house numbers added to their property. Other styles of vintage signage, such as concrete pillars, can be found around the city as well.³

Photo courtesy of Brianna Treviño.



The Raised Fist

At Taft and Pacific Streets stands a stop sign with a black line drawing of a raised fist. Since the 1968 Olympics when Black athletes raised their fists while standing on the awards podium, the raised fist has stood for solidarity, resistance, and unity.⁴ It makes me wonder if it was created during the demonstrations protesting George Floyd's death at the hands of police.

Photo courtesy of Charlotte Robinson.



The Past in the Present

The Link-Lee Mansion was constructed in 1912 as a testament to Houston's Gilded Age. At the end of World War II, it became the first building of the University of St. Thomas. Today we can see the ornate building but only imagine its 114-year history with a multitude of stories.⁵

Photo courtesy of Luis Rosales.

Put a Lease on It

The beloved Tower Theatre in Montrose has undergone many facelifts in the 90 years since its construction. Built in the iconic Art Deco style and opened on Valentine's Day in 1936, it has since housed a video rental store, a Tex-Mex restaurant, and more recently the late Acme Oyster House. It reopened as a new jazz club in late 2025.⁶

Photo courtesy of Eboni Boyd.



The Third Eye

The Magick Cauldron—a Pagan/Wiccan supply shop—first opened on the Katy Freeway in 1985 and quickly grew in popularity before moving to its permanent and current location in Montrose. An unidentified artist painted the mural during the pandemic. The face seems to call out to you, while the security camera at left grounds the photograph.⁷

Photo courtesy of Mariano Vasques Ojeda.



Mister McKinney on the bus

The photography students from the Global Studies and Anthropology Department and Houston History thank Mister McKinney for his wonderful Historic Houston tour of the Montrose neighborhood.

Photo courtesy of Umar.



Marie Theresa Hernández, Ph.D., is professor in the World Cultures Literatures Program at the University of Houston.

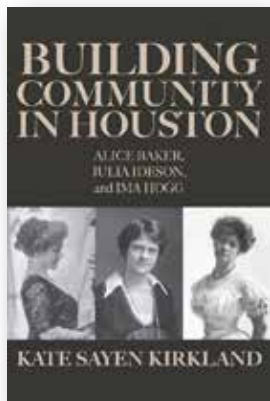
Brian Riedel, Ph.D., is associate director for the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Rice University.

A Reminder of Mary's
Opening in 1968, Mary's (originally Mary's, Naturally) was considered Houston's oldest gay bar when it closed in 2009. During the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, it became the site of community fundraising, memorials, and interment, with many who lost their lives during the epidemic having their ashes interred in Mary's' backyard.⁸

Photo courtesy of Emme Tomasello.



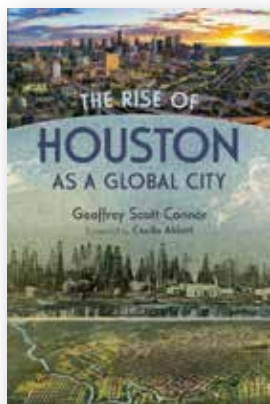
BOOKS



Building Community in Houston: Alice Baker, Julia Ideson, and Ima Hogg by Kate Sayen Kirkland (Texas A&M University Press, 2025).

Three influential twentieth-century Houston women, Alice Baker, Julia Ideson, and Ima Hogg, are remembered for their philanthropy and social justice initiatives that paved the way for desegregation, immigrant communities, and institutions that continue to serve the city.

Baker helped found and oversee the Houston Settlement Association, now BakerRipley, the region's largest nonprofit community-building agency. Ideson helped establish the Houston Public Library as a progressive municipal asset. Hogg, known for her promotion of the arts, also called attention to mental health care, public education, historic preservation, and volunteerism. Kirkland examines a diversity of sources and archives including public records and family papers to chronicle these pioneers of social justice.



The Rise of Houston as a Global City by Geoffrey Connor and Foreword by Cecilia Abbott (Texas A&M University Press, 2025).

Founded by the Allen Brothers in 1836 as a fledgling port city, Houston grew into a center of international trade. Rapid expansion began after a devastating hurricane struck Galveston in 1900 and oil was discovered in the region. Refineries developed along

the Houston Ship Channel, which became a deep-water port in 1914. Beyond shipping and oil, the city's financial and political leaders established what is now the world's largest medical complex and center of advanced medicine during World War II and ensured Houston's selection for the Manned Spaceflight Center in 1961, setting the stage for further technological expansion in the age of computing. The history of Texas's largest and the nation's fourth largest city blends "boots and oil" with technology, innovation, and ambition.

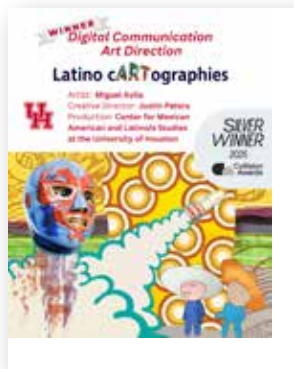
ANNOUNCEMENTS



Arte Público Press Enters a New Era of Leadership.

After 46 years leading the nation's oldest and largest publisher of Latino literature, Arte Público's founder, Nicolás Kanellos has stepped down as head

of the press. Former deputy director, Gabriela Baeza Ventura now serves as Kanellos's successor. Baeza Ventura earned her doctorate in Latin American literature at the University of Houston, where she began her journey as a research assistant with the Recovery Program, which she now directs. Over the years, she steadily rose through the ranks of Arte Público Press — moving from research assistant to managing editor, then executive editor, and ultimately to deputy director before taking the helm on September 1. Also of note, Baeza Ventura has read all 700+ titles published by Arte Público!



Latino cARTographies earned a Silver Award for Best Art Direction at the 2025 Collision Awards that recognize excellence in animation and motion design. Directed by Creative Project Manager Justin Patera and featuring artwork by Texas-based artist Miguel Avila, the project was selected by a jury of international experts.

Created by UH sociology professor, Dr. Pamela Quiroz, Latino cARTographies found itself in distinguished company with Collision Award winners Nickelodeon, Walt Disney Animations, FX Networks, and the Museum of Modern Art.

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The most recent display was at the Houston Fire Museum. Currently seeking placement with high public visibility. For more information: storyart@sloanegallery.com



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Hubert Roussel: "Extra, Extra. Read All About It!"

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Montrose: From Streetcar Suburb to Midtown Enclave

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