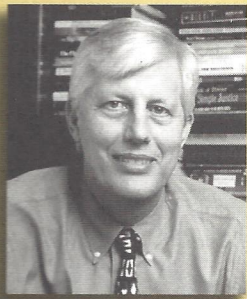


From the Editor



THE HOUSTON THAT WAS, MIGHT HAVE BEEN, AND COULD BE

I have watched our city evolve since the 1950s, and I have studied its history for most of my life. I understand that Houston's dynamism has been a central part of its allure. We are first and foremost a city of opportunity. But we have paid unnecessarily high

costs for this dynamism. One such cost has been our regular destruction of the historic structures inherited from earlier eras of our city's past. Chicago and other major cities have demonstrated that the recycling of older structures for new uses can give a distinctive feel to a city, preserving a sense of history and a sense of place.

Two missed opportunities stand out as I look back over my years in the city. Having watched the transformation of Freedmen's Town in the last decade, I have a hard time driving through the area without seeing what could have been. Here was a central and distinctive piece of our city's history in an area in sight of downtown. My mind's eye still sees what might have been: a significant green space with preserved structures. I see families and visitors from around our city and from other cities walking through the preserved grounds and thinking about how Houston presented both opportunities and barriers to once enslaved people who came here with little more than their ambitions for better lives.

A second missed opportunity is the city block of space that once housed "The Oaks," a striking home on the south end of the city at 2310 Baldwin Street. Originally built as the home of Baker, Botts partner Edwin Parker and later acquired by his colleague Captain James A. Baker, the Oaks at times played host to firm meetings. After Captain Baker's death in 1941, the Oaks served for a time as the first home of the newly organized M.D. Anderson Hospital for Cancer Research of The University of Texas. It was demolished in 1955. When I look at the vacant lot once occupied by the Oaks, I see a beautiful preserved building perhaps used as a museum on the history of the region in a setting close to both downtown and the museum district. I imagine people sitting on benches in a pleasant pocket park outside the museum, thinking about the people who laid the foundation for modern Houston.

Such musings about what might have been are not meant to place blame, but rather to remind us that we can do better. What is required is a sense of history; a vision of development that embraces, instead of bulldozes, the past; a preservationist ethic that helps define a path toward a more humane approach to growth. The articles in this issue suggest that we are learning to do better. A greater sense of urgency is needed. It is past time for Houston to recognize the benefits of historic preservation, to provide stronger legal protections to historic structures, and then to find creative ways to make them a part of our living, evolving city.

ON THE COVER— In 1929, Jesse Jones dictated that his Gulf Building be beautiful and stand tall among the noticeable structures in the modern world. Today, this elegant relic of the Roaring 20s still holds its own among its taller, modern neighbors.

Dedication

This issue is dedicated
to the memory of
Ben Love
(1924-2006).

His example reminds us all
that one life, fully lived,
can make a difference.

MUSEUM OF HOUSTON

www.museumofhouston.org

Houston's leading educational institutions, cultural organizations, and public archives are now cooperating to develop a digital storehouse of historic resources relating to Houston's past. Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (GHPA) is leading the effort to create the Museum of Houston Web site, www.museumofhouston.org. Houston Endowment Inc. has provided GHPA a \$350,000 grant to fund the first two years of the project. Mayor Bill White announced the creation of the privately funded, online Museum of Houston during a news conference on April 4, 2006.

The Museum of Houston will bring together materials held by the city's leading research institutions and make them conveniently available to a broad, public audience. The site will eventually contain hundreds of thousands of digitized letters and documents, publications, maps, photographs, artwork, audio and video.

Rice University/Fondren Library is providing technical expertise on the project. In addition to GHPA and Rice, other institutions with representatives on the Museum of Houston steering committee are Houston Public Library/Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas Southern University/Robert James Terry Library, and University of Houston Libraries.

COMMENTS...QUESTIONS...IDEAS...

Visit our web site at
www.class.uh.edu/TheHoustonReview
or e-mail us at
HoustonReview@uh.edu.