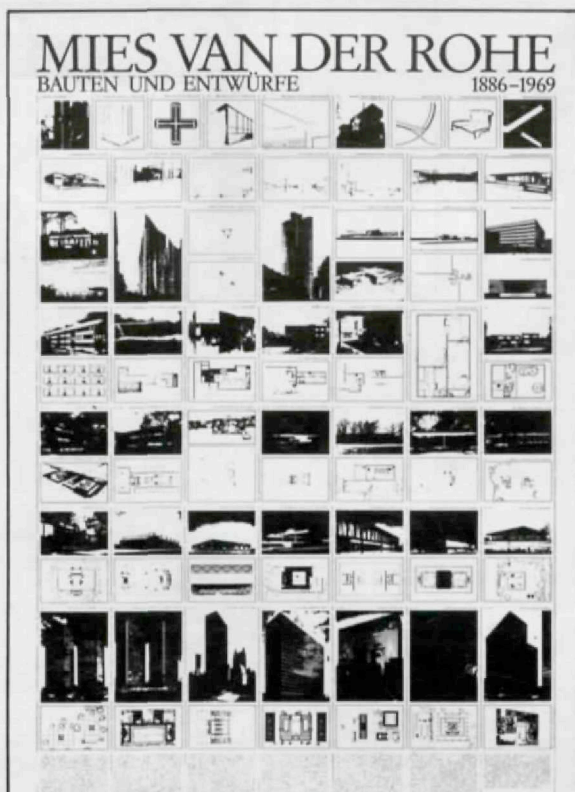
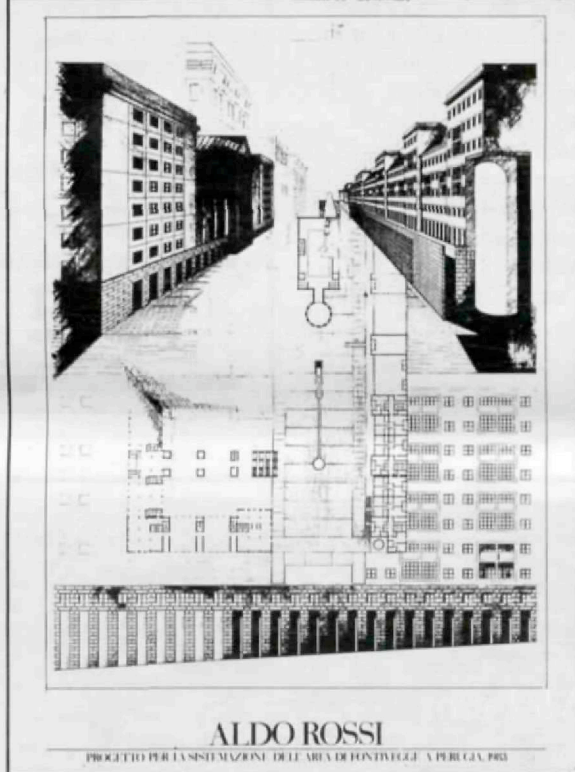


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## Citelines

# Fourth Ward Update: Houston Proud?



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The fate of Allen Parkway Village is sealed with plywood

After dark, Allen Parkway Village almost disappears from the banks of Buffalo Bayou. Presently, about 200 of its original 1,000 housing units are occupied, and these are located within the interior blocks of the World War II-era public housing project (still Houston's largest), neatly hidden from the determined rush of commuter traffic along Allen Parkway.

As families are moved out or relocated into other housing projects operated by the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH), vacant units are quickly boarded up and sealed rather than being rented to any of the considerable number of approved applicants who require subsidized housing. The dwindling number of tenants in Allen Parkway Village have little power or voice in determining the fate of their homes, despite the Resident Council's concerted opposition to HACH policies.

The Housing Authority awaits a decision by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) authorizing and funding the demolition of the federally mortgaged housing project and subsequent sale of the 37 acres of prime real estate that it occupies. This despite the fact that Allen Parkway Village contains one-third of all the public-housing units in Houston.

HUD's decision is pending an audit by the General Accounting Office (GAO) to determine how the Housing Authority spent \$10 million in federal funds allocated in 1978 for rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village. At the same time, the Allen Parkway Village Resident Council, headed by Lenwood Johnson, is preparing, with the assistance of the Gulf Coast Legal Foundation, a class-action suit contesting the demolition and sale of the project on grounds that the Housing Authority, in submitting its revised application to HUD, did not consult tenants as required. However, a recent investigation of HACH's application by the GAO as requested by U.S. Representative Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio, chairman of a congressional subcommittee overseeing housing funds, concluded that tenant consultation requirements had been met.

Despite its long-standing determination to sell the site of Allen Parkway Village, the Housing Authority continues to receive subsidies from HUD's Annual Contribution Contract to maintain the 905 units presently in the project. The only apparent use for these subsidies is to pay for the plywood with which vacant units are sealed. These plywood panels have become the most potent symbol of the condemnation of Allen Parkway Village itself.

Plywood symbolically threatens the adjoining Fourth Ward as well. The Alfred Smith House, an expansive bungalow built in 1918, and one of the last examples of substantial houses built at the turn-of-the-century in Fourth Ward by an emerging black middle class, was demolished in May by its owner after the house was cited for code violations under the city's Dangerous Building Ordinance. The Smith House was cited for being unoccupied and open to the public (a common violation) and for minor structural damage (sill rot). The owner had the options of contesting the citation in a hearing conducted by an official of the Public Works Department; securing the building; demolishing the building himself (thereby avoiding legal and demolition expenses assessed by the City Housing and Conservation Department if it had undertaken demolition); or disregarding the citation. Had the owner chosen the latter alternative, the city could have demolished the building only after obtaining an environmental clearance from the Texas Historical Commission.

Three years ago this stipulation saved both Gregory School and a house on Arthur Street in Fourth Ward; there is no doubt that it might have saved the Smith House as well, since it was listed as contributing to the significance of the Freedman's Town Historic District in Fourth Ward, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. If a building is determined by the historical commission staff to be significant (of which many buildings in Fourth Ward are by virtue of their inclusion in the Freedman's Town Historic District), the city must work with the owner to secure and rehabilitate the property.



Although the local real estate market remains in a depressed condition, Steven L. Jarnigan, spokesman for the Fourth Ward Property Owners, is optimistic about the collective sale of the 90-block neighborhood. The City Department of Planning and Development's Memorandum of Understanding with the property owners' association for optioning and selling most of the property in Fourth Ward expired in March without any offers being received. Nonetheless, it has been extended for two more years. Jarnigan suggests that out-of-town developers are presently interested in the deal and are not, as are local developers, particularly concerned with the fate of Allen Parkway Village. The city has made the sale and redevelopment of Fourth Ward contingent on the construction of 400 new units of low-income elderly housing within the new development; neglected

is any plan to relocate the remaining residents of Fourth Ward. An entry by Peter D. Waldman, Philip C. Mahla, Eduardo Robles, and Mary MacAuliffe in the Young Architects Forum Fourth Ward charrette, a weekend design symposium and competition, which accompanied Diverse Works' exhibition "Architecture and Culture: The Fourth Ward," suggested that the Fourth Ward secede from the City of Houston, develop its own economic base, and assert independence during a period of internal reconstruction. As Houston's economy naps and entrepreneurial haste is temporarily held in check, this modest proposal reminds us that the City of Houston is now as close as it might ever get to reflecting on responsible policies for development.

*Douglas Sprunt*

## Cemetery Incident Shows Need For Preservation Plan

Despite a long-standing reputation to the contrary, Houston is a city with a growing appreciation of its past. Although some of the preservation battles have been acrimonious, the city government has shown an increasing willingness to recognize the value of its material cultural heritage. Nowhere has that willingness been more evident than in the passage of an ordinance in 1984, sponsored by city council member Eleanor Tinsley, creating the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission. This ordinance was, in fact, revolutionary among local preservation statutes in that it accorded a significance equaling that of visible historic artifacts to the unseen, buried elements of the city's history and prehistory: its archeological resources. Since the creation of the commission two years ago, its members have worked (without benefit of funding or a salaried staff) with representatives of city departments to help ensure satisfaction of one of the commission's mandates: the city must take account of the impact its own projects will have on historical and archeological resources.

The commission is charged with providing informed, expert advice to the mayor and city council regarding the potential impact of city actions. Given the commission's dependence on volunteer expertise to conduct these evaluations, and the voluntary cooperation of city departments to make known their construction plans, the commission has done its best to carry out this function. However, the commission has been aware that its efforts to recognize projects warranting comment have been limited and unsystematic, relying on informal word of mouth or the news media to identify these projects.

Members of the commission, which is chaired by archeologist Margie C. Elliott, immediately realized the inadequacy and inherent dangers of this informal procedure, and have argued for the adoption of a city preservation plan. This plan would identify in advance historically and archeologically sensitive buildings, sites, and zones, and create a consistent, rational process for reviewing potentially damaging projects. Unfortunately, a widely reported event occurred in September that decisively underscores the present lack of such a process. The event is the disturbance of at least 30 historic burials in the excavation of a utility trench for a city fire department building on the long-forgotten site of Old City Cemetery in First Ward.

This incident does not represent a willfully destructive act on the part of city officials; rather, it is a case of the

sins of the fathers being visited on the sons. The decision to erase the cemetery from public memory took place in 1924, when the first Jefferson Davis Hospital was constructed. At that time, many of the headstones were removed, and the hospital structure was erected over existing grave sites — apparently without effort to re-inter the burials elsewhere. With time, most of the remaining grave markers disappeared, and the actual extent of the cemetery slipped into oblivion. It remained in that status until the city was painfully reminded of its existence in the trench-digging episode.

The fundamental irony of the situation is that only a few minutes of research could have alerted city officials to the probability that their project was to take place in a potentially archeologically sensitive area, one that is stringently protected by state law, since the cemetery appears on many historic Houston maps. When, and if, the city decides to adopt a preservation plan, the potential sensitivity of an area like this would be immediately apparent, and the project could be routed to the commission for comment. Project planners could then rationally evaluate the possible costs — economic, political, and social — of building in a known, former cemetery.

For the present, at least, we can take assurance from two factors: first, that the Public Works Department acted promptly and in good faith, notifying the Archeological and Historical Commission as soon as it became aware of the cemetery situation. Second, at the suggestion of the commission, Public Works has included a new clause in the standard city construction contract. This clause directs its contractors to discontinue work temporarily should potentially significant archeological remains be encountered, so that these remains may be professionally evaluated. (Sadly, while this clause was added months before the cemetery incident, the contract for that project was signed well before its addition.) A further step by the commission will be planned workshops to educate city inspection personnel on the recognition of archeological remains. However, archeological features can be subtle, and it is far more desirable to have an idea of possible archeological and architectural resources well in advance of actual construction, knowledge that is possible only when a city preservation plan exists.

*Roger Moore*

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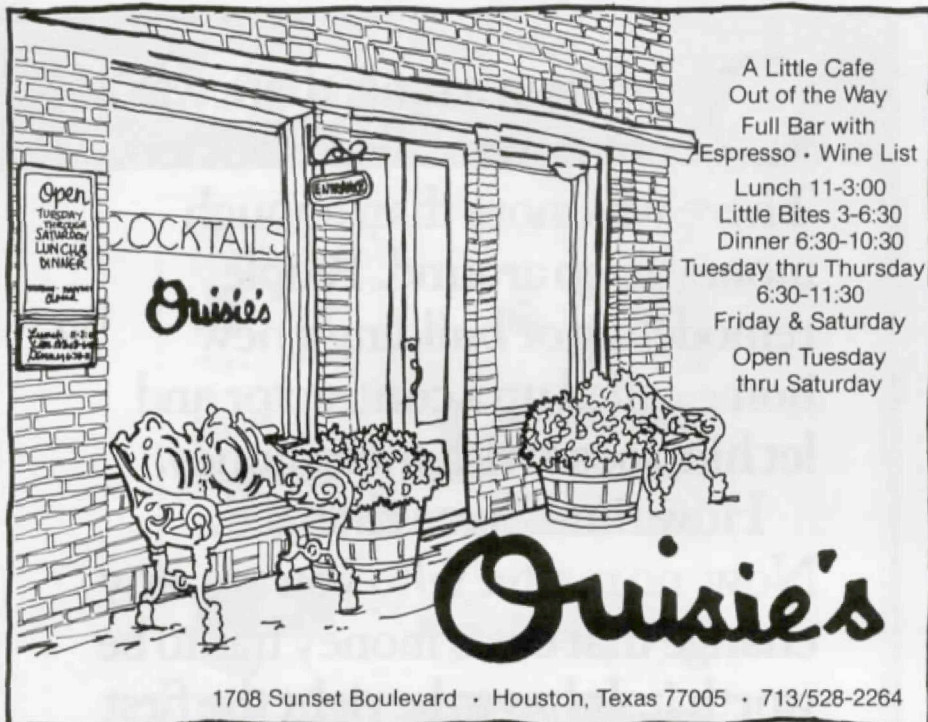
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## Winter Architectural Events

### Rice Design Alliance

P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas  
77251-1892, 713/524-6297

### 3 December 1986 — Symposium:

"Building Houston in the 1990s."

Participants include John Walsh, president, Friendswood Development; Bob Hutchins, chief executive officer, Gemcraft Homes; Charles Savino, director of research, Houston Chamber of Commerce; Patrick Oxford, general partner, Western Growth Pool, Ltd.; and Steve Katz, associate, Smith, Murdaugh, Little, and Crawford. Brown Auditorium, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Main and Bissonet; admission charged. For time and reservations, telephone the Rice Design Alliance.

### 20 January-18 February — Four-part

lecture series: "On Edge: Recent California Architecture." All lectures held at 8 PM, Brown Auditorium, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Main and Bissonet; admission charged. For reservations, telephone the Rice Design Alliance.

20 February 1987 — Frank O. Gehry (co-sponsored with the Contemporary Arts Museum)

4 February 1987 — Reyner Banham

11 February 1987 — Eric Owen Moss

18 February 1987 — Michael Rotondi (Morphosis)

### Contemporary Arts Museum

5216 Montrose Boulevard, Houston,  
Texas 77006-6598, 713/526-3129

### 21 January-23 February 1987 —

Exhibition: "The Architecture of Frank Gehry." Organized by the Walker Art Center. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 AM-5 PM, Sunday, 12 noon-6 PM; admission free. Opening lecture by Frank O. Gehry, 20 January 1987 (see Rice Design Alliance).

### Farish Gallery

M.D. Anderson Hall, Rice University  
713/527-4870

### 21 January-23 February 1987 —

Exhibition: "This Edifice is Colossal: Architecture and 19th-Century Photography." Organized by the Museum of Photography, George Eastman House. Introductory lecture (for date, time, and location, telephone the gallery). Open daily, 12 noon-5 PM; admission free.

### Greater Houston Preservation Alliance

22 January 1987 — Lecture: William Seale, "A History of The White House, Washington, D.C." For time, location, and ticket information, telephone Minnette B. Boesel at 713/658-8938.

### 17 December 1986; 21 January 1987;

18 February 1987 — Guided walking

tour of Main Street-Market Square Historic District in downtown Houston.

Tour groups assemble at corner of Milam Street and Preston Avenue; 12 noon; \$1 fee. To arrange special group tours, telephone Barthel Truxillo at 713/861-6236.

### Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects

20 Greenway Plaza, Suite 246,  
Houston, Texas 77046-2002, 713/622-2081

### 21 December 1986; 18 January 1987;

22 February 1987 — Guided walking

tour of new architecture in downtown Houston. Tour groups assemble in

lobby of Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1200 Louisiana Street; 2 PM; \$3 fee. For

reservations, telephone the Houston Chapter, AIA.

### School of Architecture, Rice University

713/527-4870

13 January 1987 — Lecture: Spiro Kostof, Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Professor, "The Epic of Rome: City Form as History," 7:30 PM; Sewall Hall, Room 301, Rice University campus; admission free.

## Lawndale Rebounds

The University of Houston's Lawndale Art and Performance Center reopened for its seventh year this fall, overcoming the threat of closing brought on by its shaky financial history and state-mandated budget cuts.

Lawndale's new director, Mary Evelyn Sorrell, has developed a program which focuses on Houston's artistic community. Several grant awards from such sources as the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), The Cultural Arts Council of Houston, and the Texas Commission on the Arts will contribute to reinforcing Lawndale's support of local and regional artists. In addition to financing Lawndale activities, a portion of the funds will be distributed directly to artists in the form of expenses and honorariums. Lawndale will continue to emphasize performance art, video art, and inter-arts projects.

Three or more NEA grants of up to two thousand dollars each will be awarded to artists to create inter-arts installations and performances to be exhibited at Lawndale from 3 January to 2 February. "Focus on Video" is an eight-month series (first Thursday of each month) that began on 7 November and features an open screening of new local and regional videos along with the Whitney Biennial Video Series, which includes work by Woody Vasulka, Dara Birnbaum, Joan Jonas, Bill Viola, and Lyn Blumenthal. "On the Edge," which

opened 21 November, provides a forum for Houston-area artists involved in live performance, and is directed by a committee of multi-media artists who are members of the Lawndale Artists Advisory Board and others. "Diverse Idioms," which opened 15 November, is an exhibition of works by 14 Texas and Oklahoma artists, selected by Joy Poe, founder of Artemisia alternative gallery in Chicago. Through 17 December, "Diverse Idioms" will exhibit sculpture, painting, printmaking, weaving, drawing, photography, assemblage, and handmade books.

Luis Jiménez will be the guest juror for the fourth annual East End Show. For the first time, this exhibition also will include the work of artists from East End high schools. Jiménez will speak at schools and will give a public talk about his current work at Lawndale. An exhibition of student projects from schools of architecture in Texas will be organized by Christine Cinciripini, architect and assistant professor of architecture at the University of Houston. James Surls, artist and founder of Lawndale, will return to direct an exhibition of large-scale sculpture which will take place in May. Surls will moderate a panel discussion with artists, entitled "Attitudes Towards Three Dimensions."

Christine Cinciripini