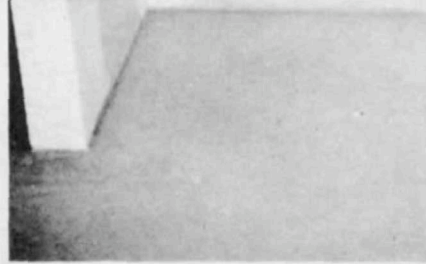


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## HindCite

### Crabbing About Preservation

John Kaliski and Stephen Fox



Top: Crabb House, 1936, John F. Staub, architect. Above: Crabb House, demolished, 1985 (Photos by Paul Hester)

One of Houston's most famous and beautiful houses, the Dolores Welder Crabb Mitchell House at Pine Valley and Troon in River Oaks, was demolished on May Day, despite outcries of protest from the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance and a demonstration organized by Carolyn Farb whose participants included Mrs. Lloyd M. Bentsen III, Mrs. Peter S. Meyer, Mrs. Thomas W. Houghton, and Mrs. Peter T. Scardino. The Spanish Colonial style house — built in 1936 to the designs of John F. Staub — and its gardens were sold to Kenneth L. Schnitzer, Jr. and Douglas W. Schnitzer, who have retained Benjamin E. Brewer, Jr. to design replacement houses on the site. While the owners were completely within their legal rights to first strip and then bulldoze the house, is the issue merely: one can do with one's property as one pleases?

The destruction of any clearly superior example of Houston's architectural heritage in any stable, restricted neighborhood both diminishes the overall quality of the immediate environment for the people who reside there and hastens the destruction of a fundamental public trust that these stable neighborhoods constitute for all of Houston's citizens. In an essay which appears in *Modulus 16*, "Towards a New (Old) Architecture," Carroll W. Westfall defines the meaning of public rights in a civilized city and their relationship to architecture:

*...buildings serve institutions and give form to the civil and political values they promote;*

*...cities are places where public purposes shape and check private ends;*

*...buildings in cities represent that balance between public and private which promotes civility.*

Westfall does not limit his argument to public structures but aptly demonstrates that "...ornamenting the city with decorous private residences [has] a public consequence and affects the community at large. They are clothed with a public interest, and therefore ought to be retained as part of the city." The author suggests that an owner who cannot inhabit an important structure without destroying it should, with the public trust in mind, divest himself of it.

Houston does have a past — historical, institutional, and architectural. The continuing destruction of this past, both public and private, works like an amnesia to vandalize and demean the values that made Houston great. ■

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