



The Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral (Olle J. Lorehn, 1912) as it looked in 1940.

Courtesy Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

## Sacred Heart(Breaking) News

**THIS YEAR MARKS THE 90TH** anniversary of the completion and dedication of Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral, one of Houston's oldest religious structures. Unfortunately, it appears highly unlikely that the current Sacred Heart will survive to celebrate its centennial. In May 2001, Joseph A. Fiorenza, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Galveston-Houston, announced plans for the construction of a new cathedral that will replace the existing Sacred Heart. The site for the new church was cleared in spring 2002. Designed by Ziegler Cooper Architects, the new 2,100-seat edifice will cost an estimated \$50 million and be constructed on property adjacent to the current cathedral. A 2004 completion date is projected. At the same press conference in which plans for the new cathedral were unveiled, it was also announced that the 1912 cathedral would be demolished to provide room for a plaza and increased parking space. The pastor of Sacred Heart, the Rev. R. Troy Gately, reportedly described the decision to raze the existing Sacred Heart as "difficult." The building, he said, "has severe structural difficulties that would have cost millions to repair."

Completed in 1912 as a parish church serving the south end of Houston, Sacred Heart was designed by Houston architect Olle J. Lorehn in a neo-Gothic style and was constructed for less than \$100,000. The cathedral's original interior was altered during a 1964 renovation, but the buff pressed-brick exterior remains much the same as it was at the time of its dedication. In 1959, the administrative offices of the Diocese of Galveston were moved to Houston. Sacred Heart was selected to serve as the co-cathedral (along with St. Mary's in Galveston) of the renamed diocese of Galveston-Houston. Its name was formally changed to Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral on December 24 of that year.

Besides its value as a historic structure, Sacred Heart is important to Houston's architectural history for another reason: it is one of the few surviving buildings designed by Lorehn, one of the city's most important architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in 1864, Lorehn immigrated to the United States from Sweden as a young man, and arrived

in Houston from St. Louis in 1893 to supervise construction of the American Brewing Company complex. Less than two decades after his arrival in Texas, he had become a leading figure in the movement to professionalize the practice of architecture in the state, and had also designed civic and commercial buildings that constituted an important part of Houston's cityscape. Besides Sacred Heart, his works include the Binz Building (1894, demolished), regarded at the time of its completion as Houston's first skyscraper; Houston Fire Station No. 7 (1899), which survives today as the Houston Fire Museum; and the Noyce Hart House (1910) and W.T. Carter Jr. House (1912), both still extant. The existing buildings are all listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Fortunately for the historic record, Sacred Heart was documented this spring as a Historic American Building Survey project. The documentation includes measured drawings, photographs, sketches, and a narrative history of the cathedral. With Houston's extremely weak preservation ordinance offering scant protection for landmark buildings, such a project is virtually the only option remaining open to historians, architects, and preservationists hoping to preserve some recorded memory of Houston's demolished historic structures.

The project is a joint effort by volunteer members of the Historic Houston organization, directed by Lynn Edmundson, and students from the University of Houston's Workshop for Historic Architecture, led by instructor Jim Arnold. Historic Houston recently received a \$1,500 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to assist with the documentation. In addition to Sacred Heart, the volunteers and students also plan to document two endangered historic residences, the W.L. Foley House and the A.B. Cohn House. A virtual tour of the documented buildings will be available on Historic Houston's web site, [www.historichouston.org](http://www.historichouston.org).

—Steven R. Strom



Pole-ish joke?: Parking-meter poles block the Rice Village's sidewalks.

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## Meter Madness

**IN APRIL THE CITY** of Houston surprised storekeepers in the Rice Village by announcing plans to install curbside parking meters; the storekeepers' uproar halted the project until June. But while business owners and city officials wrangled over the pros and cons of pay parking, the metal poles that would support the meters were installed in the middle of Village sidewalks, where they inconvenience pedestrians and obstruct wheelchairs and baby strollers.

Why block the sidewalks of one of Houston's rare pedestrian-friendly districts? The walkways in question lay adjacent to the curb, and Joel Albrecht, assistant chief clerk of the Houston Municipal Court, explained that in order for car doors and bumpers to extend over the curb, it's the industry standard for meter poles to stand two feet away from the street.

"It just so happens," Albrecht said, "that the sidewalk had to be perforated because it happened to be in that place."

—Robert Reichle