

We may live without [architecture] and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her.

— John Ruskin

August 1986 marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of Houston. In honor of that event, itself a ritual of time and its passage, the summer issue of *Cite* is dedicated to Houston's Sesquicentennial. In recent years a search for the essence of the city has been the theme of essays, editorials, and ad campaigns. Rather than impose a character on the city, however, we have allowed the face of Houston to emerge in the work of the authors and photographers reproduced here. That architecture and land development play so prominent a role should not surprise citizens of a city which dates its founding from the appearance of advertisements placed in New York newspapers. Most critical in the city's existence has been the last 40 years. It is this that is our focus: the years when the population moved from 385,000 to 1,700,000 and the boundaries of the city limits pushed beyond the visible horizon. The buildings and places create a portrait that fills our collective memory. Preserving that heritage, while looking forward to the next 150 years, we recollect and record Houston at 150.

Elizabeth S. Glassman

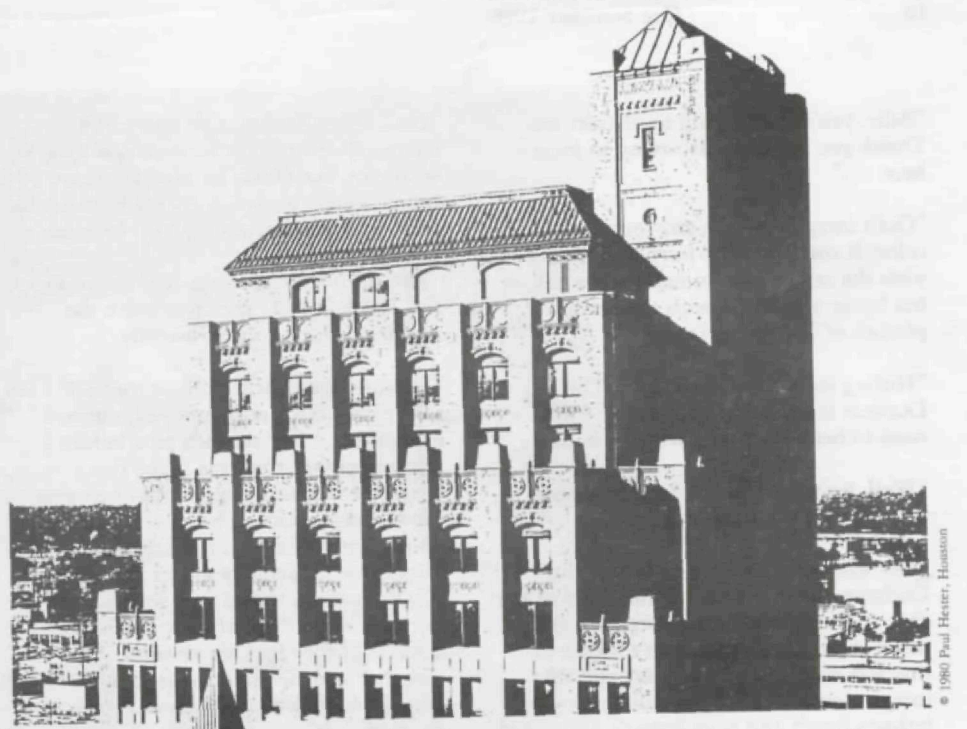
TEXAS

Here too. Here as at the other edge
Of the hemisphere, an endless plain
Where a man's cry dies a lonely death.
Here too the Indian, the lasso, the wild horse.
Here too the bird that never shows itself,
That sings for the memory of one evening
Over the rumblings of history;
Here too the mystic alphabet of stars
Leading my pen over the page to names
Not swept aside in the continual
Labyrinth of days: San Jacinto
And that other Thermopylae, the Alamo.
Here too the never understood,
Anxious, and brief affair that is life.

Jorge Luis Borges

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"The Tejas Club" is excerpted from *Baby Houston*, written in 1982 and to be posthumously published by Texas Monthly Press in 1987.



The Tejas Club

June Arnold

I am looking over the balcony of the Tejas Club. Houston is host to a mist tonight; the outlines of our tiny city are blurred even for those who are not near-sighted, making our downtown look fuzzy and naive. In this room, which should be used for dancing between courses of delicious food, are now crowded the heads of Houston and at least the shoulders of the United States government. President Roosevelt is not here but Eleanor is. Governor and Mrs. Hobby, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Will Clayton, the heads of Humble, Gulf, and Shell, Todd Shipyard, Hughes Tool, Cameron Iron Works - along with the mayor of Houston and Benjie from the OPA.

Cad and I are official hostesses. My special assignment is to forestall any reference to the great rubber fight between Jesse Jones and our vice president, Henry Wallace. We are also supposed to separate the Duchess from Eleanor; Oveta Culp Hobby from the religious fool who still believes women should be mummy-wrapped; to support the mayor in his bid for the Port of Houston as recipient of war contracts (against some members of Washington who consider port cities too vulnerable).

Cad made me promise that I would surround the Duchess so she can't give Eleanor a piece of her mind on the racial question but the Duchess currently distrusts me absolutely: Oscar told her he wanted a divorce last month; although they are now back together (gift of our community property laws), the reconciliation is as unstable as tepid Jell-O. All Cad has to do is remember everyone's political allergies and - if the vice president should show up - get Oscar immediately. She will hardly be busy at all; I am nervous that she will be watching me.

The power in the room is thundering. Patriotism, the war effort, the urge to produce - quickly, efficiently, full-speed-ahead, especially those products that we have to invent, like rubber - speaks directly to our collective energetic Houston hearts. We are on our figurative hands and knees begging for the chance to build ships, produce airplane parts, manufacture aviation fuel, and process chemicals we are just learning to spell like toluene for explosives and butadiene and styrene for synthetic rubber. I can feel it swelling the room: the belief that the city we created was for just this purpose: to prove that excess is our country's greatest asset. And excess is Texas.

Jesse Jones with his mop of white hair towers above the Washington men; Oveta Culp Hobby has a face that is so beautiful and quick and iced with grace that I feel sorry for Eleanor Roosevelt who, the

Duchess observes, is long in the tooth like a horse. But Mrs. Roosevelt asked Cad to call her Eleanor and I sidle near when I see the Duchess sitting deep in a charm session with our mayor.

Eleanor is like a magnet; as soon as I am near I am swept into her orbit. The war will at least provide opportunity for the Negro and women, she is saying.

There is no Negro here except the waiter, and I, as an example of war-time woman, feel thrown back a hundred years into my role as bandage-roller and sweet-smiler. I feel this even though Cad and I have gone to work at the Office of Price Administration - even though I have found a job Oscar's sister can take and even though we are dealing with money. We are dealing with prices, I think, as usual.

"They also serve who only sit and wait." I surprise myself by saying that; I speak sweetly though, as usual.

Eleanor turns. "Oh, my dear, I certainly have no intention of sitting and waiting at all. And I really don't believe that our young women do either. They are signing up for factory jobs in droves." She bares her long teeth but she speaks sweetly too - although not nearly as sweetly as I.

"Of course you are right," I say. "What an opportunity for a girl who thought her only chance was the five-and-ten. But I wonder - just a little - if war doesn't always set women back. When the whole country is focused on the soldier, the strong brave young man . . ."

Cad jumps in at my hesitation. "Have you looked around the room, my friend? There's no one present under forty and I get the distinct sense that the war is being fought right here."

Eleanor reaches out to touch Cad's arm with that gesture so characteristic of eastern women - deft, glancing, suggesting the choosing of sides rather than warmth. She is winning my best friend away from me. "But when the young men must give their lives, surely they deserve the name of hero."

I am isolated; I grow stubborn. "Women give their lives to bring these heroes into the world and we are not given that title."

Cad's stare tells me to stop immediately, I have lost my mind, this is the First Lady of the land. But Eleanor's face is frozen in a sudden thought; I can almost see the currents whirling in her brain. Her hand is raised palm up toward my face. "You will be!" The sparkle in her eyes is giving me official sanction. "We will institute a

Mother of the Year. A four-star mother. An award for the mother with the most sons in service in their country. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for suggesting it, . . .?" She wants my name again. Am I Eudora or just Baby?

"Baby," I murmur. "I'm Oscar Yancey's sister."

But Eleanor's smile is just for me. "I went to school with a girl from the South - oh so many years ago! Everyone in her family was referred to by their familial relationship - Brother, Sister, Baby. She was named for her mother but called Ditty - for ditto. I find it absolutely charming.

"Well, I think *you're* absolutely charming." I am blushing and dimpling with pleasure.

Her laugh is shockingly young and strong. Heads turn. I can't believe it: She leans over and kisses me on the cheek.

The Duchess must have seen; her voice is too loud and close for coincidence. "Whatever we have to do to win this war the one thing we must not do under any circumstances is allow colored soldiers to share quarters with our white boys. I hope no one is such a fool as to do that. It would be suicide!"

There are no military men here - presumably they have their hands full; this gathering is to ensure production. Therefore the Duchess has latched onto Jesse Jones as the nearest and most southern voice in line with Roosevelt's ear.

He says something softly.

"But I mean *suicide*," the Duchess emphasizes. "Our white soldiers will have to tell them what to do instead of fighting the war - they'll have to protect them on the front lines. Why, they don't even know . . ."

My arm whips through Eleanor's and I firmly walk her over to an opposite clearing where Oveta Culp Hobby is discussing soldiers too.

" . . . manpower shortage. Women could fill at least 20 percent of the jobs now done by the army, freeing men for combat . . ."

I leave Eleanor and spin back to the Duchess. With my arm across Jesse Jones at the waist (I cannot encircle that girth but I am tall enough to reach it) I tell the Duchess what an astonishingly beautiful dress she is wearing, how lovely that fuschia is, how bright and cheerful, how . . .

"Baby, you're just trying to distract me. Thank you but as I was saying to Jesse here . . ."

"Can't imagine where you found that color! It combines the purple of courage with the red of determination, the silk of our brave ally China with the ostrich plumes of Victorian America . . ."

"Hiding its head in the sand?" The Duchess is quick but I am taller; I do not need to bend my knees with Jesse Jones.

"Well, we've pulled our heads up now," I say. "Aimed them right at . . ."

"Just what I was saying to Jesse," the Duchess interrupts with a futile lift of her chin - she is much the shortest of the three of us. "And we mustn't forget that this war will be over someday and that integration of the troops will destroy *your* father's South and *your* father's South and *my* father's . . ."

"South," Jesse interrupts.

"Why, *yes*." The Duchess rests her case.

I am about to remove myself to a new problem spot when the Duchess spies the lieutenant of our Vice President Wallace (Jesse Jones's announced enemy) standing in the doorway. He spies her and rushes over.

It is happening behind Jesse's immense back. He is not easy to wheel to a safe section of the room; when my arm tries to slide him away like I did Eleanor it is like sliding an oil derrick. I plead my need for a drink. I am dying of thirst. "My tongue is parched - hanging out." I say with a laugh but of course do not hang it. Jesse is surprised but merely beckons to a waiter; here at the Tejas Club he doesn't expect to have to go to the bar for me.

Jesse's opponent is kissing the Duchess. He is a handsome southern-looking man with idealistic eyes. Although Jones is from Tennessee, he stands for the westernness of our state: get it done. With his kiss from the Duchess (on the mouth where the lipstick belongs, she says coyly) still damp, the vice president's lieutenant picks up an obviously unfinished argument: "We don't need *half* that rubber, Jesse, and you know it. You want to spend the taxpayers' hard-earned money . . ."

"We'll need twice that much by *July*," Jesse says firmly. "And I imagine more of that money is mine than yours since I don't have a church to hide my income in . . ."

"We have freedom of religion in this country, thank God." The idealistic eyes manage to look like they just got off the boat.

"Why, of course we do!" I say sweetly, bending my knees toward our refugee. "And I've always thought the collection plates are so beautiful they should be used for something besides just money . . ."

"Oh, he doesn't have a *congregation*," Jesse says. "Although I'm sure, since he declared his house a 'church,' that he preaches a sermon there every Sunday." His heavy sarcasm alarms me; I sense it is totally uncharacteristic and tug at his waist once more. He won't budge; however, he does brush his hand over the back of his jacket to see what is yanking at him there. I seize the hand.

"Mrs. Roosevelt said she had to speak to you right away." I am pulling his fingers.

"I didn't hear her," the Duchess says. Eleanor is a dozen heads away nodding intently to Oveta Culp Hobby.

"Such a beautiful dress!" I wave my free hand and tow Jesse to the ladies.

He is so gallant I am not surprised to see him bow and kiss the hands of both our First Lady and Oveta. Then he looks expectantly at Eleanor's face.

"You wanted to talk to Mr. Jones about his rubber," I say hopefully.

"His rubber?" Oveta looks wary.

"The shortage is quite critical," Eleanor says gravely.

"Oh." Oveta smiles with relief. "Of course. Rubber." She is small and dark with eyes like Olivia de Havilland, and so immaculately groomed I want to check for stray pink threads on my own hemline.

"The president has utter confidence in Mr. Jones and his ability to solve the problem," Eleanor says warmly.

"Because South America has rubber!" I am so pleased that I remember my current events that a few seconds pass before I also remember that this is the exact source of violent disagreement between Jones and the vice president. "Did you know that rubber comes from trees?" I tell Oveta. "It actually *grows*. But I'm sure *you* knew that." I feel very intimidated between these two career women and sense that they look down on women like me; that knowledge is making me act silly. I straighten up. At least I got Jesse away from his enemy. Now all I have to do is get the conversation off South America.

It's too late. Oveta, thinking to please Eleanor, comments on the vice president's plan to feed the natives of the Amazon Valley in return for their chopping down the wild rubber trees there.

Jesse Jones believes in paying them cash for their rubber on the grounds that the natives won't bother to work if they're already fed. He now remarks to Oveta that the rubber governments will resent any patronizing attitude on our part and the implied insult to their native diet.

I am crazy about Roosevelt but none of us understand why he put *both* Jesse Jones and the vice president in charge of solving the rubber shortage, each as head of a different agency. They are opposite personalities: our agricultural vice president wanting to feed natives, our Houstonian insisting on contracts and money.

Of course, Eleanor can't take sides between her husband's second-in-command and the giant towering over us right this minute; she is wearing gray chiffon and pearls. I was delegated to prevent from happening exactly what is now happening. But when I order my mind to think *rubber* it comes up with a picture of Cad and me in those rubber girdles we bought last summer to make us sweat and lose weight.

"It must be very hot in the Amazon jungle," I say, looking from Oveta (still waiting for her answer from Eleanor) to Eleanor (preparing her nonanswer) to Jesse whose face shows the beginnings of a violent scowl beneath its skin now so cleanly arranged. "What kind of food do we want to send them?"

"Rice." Jesse manages to get something so ominous into that one-syllable word that I am awed. "Eight thousand tons of rice. Coincidentally Pará - which is a state on the Amazon - exports rice. I am told that they have, at this very moment, an enormous quantity of rice with no buyers. A glut of rice." Jesse is speaking directly to me as if an obsession with rice were evident on my face.

"I certainly want to assure you, Mr. Jones," Eleanor begins in her amazing ability to speak in paragraphs, "that I am in sympathy with and personally appreciate the sentiments behind your recent suggestion that the underprivileged of our own country, the shocking pockets of poverty in the midst of plenty which we still have in the United States, could benefit from governmental concern about *their* nutritional lacks. It is a noble thought and does you much credit."

Jesse bows slightly but is silent. Oveta is wildly alert. She certainly knows what she's in the middle of. At that moment I spy the Duchess, with the vice president's lieutenant in tow, heading dead for our group. I place my empty glass on a passing tray and reach for a full dark-colored one, hoping for bourbon, willing to accept rye, scotch - anything made from oats, wheat, corn, barley, anything but rice.

"Okay, guy," the vice president's lieutenant says to Jesse Jones. "I just want you to know that I told Henry" - that's our vice president - "that there's no way we can give all that food to the Amazon

people and still get rubber. I just want you to know that I'm a Texan too and a business man and I know you can't expect anyone to work on a full belly. It gives them motivation cramps - hahaha."

Eleanor recoils and I'm sure was going to speak but the Duchess thrusts her face right in the First Lady's and says, "You can't go against human nature - I was telling Popsy that just the other night." The reconciliation has produced "Popsy"? "If the good Lord had wanted the Black-eyed Susans to cross-pollinate with the Easter lilies He wouldn't have made one with a root system and the other with a bulb system, I know that." Her smile is dazzling.

"And furthermore Henry agrees with me that social conditions make it imperative that we conduct further study on the Amazon situation before we consider shipping them food. BEW is drawing up a plan of study right now . . ."

BEW? Much as I love FDR I think his compulsion for initials is turning the USA into a giant monogram joke.

" . . . take the money we were going to spend on food . . ."

"How much money?" It is a question Jones learned at his mother's knee and asks frequently.

"I'm terribly afraid I don't understand the significance of the bulb system and the root system?" Eleanor's voice is as frozen as a Holland winter.

"Five hundred million?" Jesse Jones practically shouts from outrage at the blood of Houston being sprayed out like bayou water.

"I said *under* five hundred million . . ."

"For a *study*?" We are not that hipped on education in cowboyland.

"For the whole project. The study shouldn't run more than four or five million."

"Three generations of southerners is not long enough to forget . . ."

"Three times the total amount of money which saved the entire banking establishment in Houston in 1933?"

There is no more I can do. I extricate myself and head toward "Popsy." Let them sweat like the Amazon natives, like the figure-conscious women.

Oscar, when I find him, has just noticed the ruckus in the corner - hard to miss with Jones's towering white head shaking in rage over a sea of coiffures.

"Brother, it's such a wonderful party," I say, bending my knees, dimpling pink. "Maybe it would be a good idea to get everyone seated at the table now?"

I catch Oveta's eye as she takes her seat; does she give me a tiny wink? Of course at the table all enemies are carefully separated.

We are having shrimp remoulade, filet mignon with squash soufflé, avocado and Texas grapefruit salad - because I am in charge of the menu we also have tiny creamed onions and a choice of sherbet or chocolate mousse.

Oscar introduces the first of the speakers during the shrimp. By the time the last of the mousse has disappeared, all of us are ready to go to work immediately and produce, produce, produce. Then Oscar winds up the speeches by quoting General Sherman: "Sherman said, 'War is hell.' " There is a twinkle in his eye and everyone waits expectantly for the renegade Sherman to be contradicted. "I say - begging the ladies' pardon, 'Hell, war is *business*.'" The applause is like the roar of a tableful of cannon and the Washington contingent stands and claps to be noticed above the patriotism of Houston.

We break up right after dinner because the men (and Oveta and Eleanor) have been meeting all day and will again tomorrow. Benjie offers to take Cad and me to Jackie's for a nightcap (he is not a member of the Tejas Club because he is

Jewish) but Cad feels too patriotic to gamble. Johnny enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor and Cad thinks she should go home and write him a letter - we have been persuaded that letters win the war too.

"Well, I will buy *you* a drink." I am holding Benjie's arm and now squeeze it. I have a knot in my stomach as if we are mobilizing against Hitler with our right hand and supporting him with our left, as if my buying Benjie a drink will drown anti-Semitism. As soon as our drinks are set before us the waiter presents Benjie with the check to sign. He hands it to me. The waiter produces the manager just as I have finished signing Oscar's name with a flourish.

"I'm sorry, madam, but ladies are not permitted in the Tejas Club except when escorted by a member," our martinet explains politely.

"I am not allowed to buy these drinks?"

He shakes his head sadly. Benjie starts to rise; I get up too and take the arm I just squeezed.

"Well, thank you very much," I say. The Tejas Club would make a wonderful dancing club but the tables take up all the floor space except for rare parties. I begin dancing in a pathway and singing since we have no music. "Don't be a baby, Baby . . ." I arrange Benjie's arms in a fox trot position. "The drinks are on the house, Benjie. We have to show our appreciation." He won't smile but he won't abandon me either. "Baby me," I sing. "Come on and humhumhum and baby me . . ." I am looking up at his deep sad overhung eyes; his touch is hesitant. "Cuddle up and don't be blue," I sing, disregarding lyric and tune with baby pride. He is getting ready to laugh. I see the manager shrug and sit at a distant table; I know the waiter doesn't care; I know him from when he was at the Country Club.

Benjie grabs my dress at the waist; he begins to tango. He sings with a roar: "Oh, the lady in pink. The fellows are crazy 'bout the lady in pink." The dance is taking all his breath so I do the next line: "She's a bit naughty but lawdy . . ." I point a perfect leg ostentatiously out to the side. "What a personality."

The war has become a musical comedy. I am Betty Grable offering my legs to bolster OPA morale. I wish I had thrown the drinks in the manager's face instead.

"Oh, the lady's in pink, and this fella's crazy 'bout the lady in pink . . . let her be naughty cause lawdy . . ." He's running out of wind but he repeats it all gasping, holding my hand in a damp vise. When he stops he steadies his diaphragm and bows frugally.

Our drinks are still on the table. I do not want even a swallow of mine. I address the manager crouched over a table near the far door. "I just want you to know that neither Mr. Falk nor I will ever set foot in this club again and I intend to tell my brother that there's something too peculiar about the heads of a democracy meeting at a place as snobbish as this one is. It certainly won't happen again!" As I wait for the elevator on Benjie's arm, I even believe I have the power to prevent it. "I'll personally see that it doesn't."

When I am alone, ready for bed, I place the First Lady's kiss on the shelf where the company china stays; I store the sentence that got it for me - honoring motherhood - among the everyday pots and pans.

I am thinking of Oveta. I think she does not look down on me. I think she does not feel superior to me because I am nothing but a housewife. I think - of course I could be wrong - that she meant to tell me, by the wink I *think* she sent my way, that she is not deceived. We will never speak of it but I think she is extraordinary and wonderful. I hope she gets her army of women. ■



Esther Bubley, *South Main Street, Houston, 1945.*
Courtesy of the Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection, University of Louisville Photographic Archives



Nicholas Nixon, *South Boulevard, Houston, 1977.*
Courtesy of Benteler Galleries, Houston



Robert Frank, *Prudential Building, Houston, 1955.*
Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.