



BY BEN KOUSH

## By the Wayside

**THE AREA OF HOUSTON'S** East End along South Wayside Drive between Lawndale Avenue and Harrisburg Boulevard contains a surprisingly rich collection of well-designed buildings and fascinating urban developments. This Wayside corridor developed rapidly in the first half of the 20th century. From the 1900s to the 1940s a number of important cultural, social, and commercial institutions and developments were located in the area. In the late 1940s and early 1950s a surge of construction, which included several significant examples of modern architecture, coincided with the 1951 completion of the Gulf Freeway to Wayside Drive. Then things began to change. Most new development shifted south, and in 1957 the last remnants of the area's genteel origins symbolically disappeared with the removal of the Houston Country Club to far west Houston. The decades following were a period of slow decline as middle-class inhabitants began to move to outlying subdivisions.

By the 1970s the East End had become almost completely Hispanic. The Wayside corridor was no different. But what was interesting about the area is that while in much of the East End the ethnic shift meant as well a shift from middle-income to lower-income families, in the Wayside corridor middle-class desirability was retained, only with a new Spanish-speaking majority.

This section of Houston has been buffered by a variety of relatively large, long lasting commercial and institutional developments such as the Houston

Photo from *Houston* magazine, April 1941. Courtesy Ben Koush.

Photo courtesy Barry Moore

## A model of urban development in the East End

Country Club, the Hughes Tool Company, Forest Park Cemetery, and the Villa de Matel. Because they acquired sizeable tracts of land for longterm use, they helped the area remain relatively stable, with a rate of change that has been gradual compared to other sections of the East End. Interspersed among these developments were comparatively small, middle-class residential subdivisions. These subdivisions were small enough that residents felt a sense of solidarity and commitment, even as surrounding areas declined.

Driving today along South Wayside Drive between Lawndale Avenue and Harrisburg Boulevard one notices the pleasant, suburban atmosphere: large areas of greenery at the Villa de Matel, a series of stone gates at Idylwood, the fairways of the former Houston Country Club, the large Willow Oaks of Houston Country Club Place, and remnants of the commercial development once limited to the blocks around the intersection of Harrisburg Boulevard and South Wayside Drive. In a city where most of the urban field is a disorganized patchwork of incompatible uses, this coherence is notable. As such it presents an effective model of urban development in a suburban, automobile centered city, a model whose history deserves to be more widely known and understood.

In 1903 the Houston elite built Houston's first golf course, the Houston Golf Club, on a 45-acre tract along Buffalo Bayou that had been leased from the Rice Institute. The original nine-hole course

was on the south side of the bayou west of downtown, where today the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas now stands. In 1908 the club renamed itself the Houston Club and purchased 156 acres of rolling terrain along Brays Bayou bounded to the west by South Wayside Drive between Capitol Avenue and Lawndale Avenue. According to the city map of 1913, the first golf course on the new site had nine holes. By the time the 1920 city map was published the course showed 18 holes. The Houston Country Club was accessible from downtown via the Harrisburg streetcar line, and members often played a round of golf during lunch breaks. Prominent early members of the club included Will C. Hogg, Howard R. Hughes, Jesse H. Jones, Hugo V. Neuhaus, and Ben Taub.

The original clubhouse, located on the northern section of the property, was a rambling, two-story Craftsman style building designed by Sanguinet & Staats and completed in 1909. It was remodeled in 1921 at the behest of Hugo Neuhaus, who commissioned New York architect Harrie T. Lindeberg to design a swimming pool with pink stucco bath houses and shaded arcades modeled on classical Roman baths along three of its sides. The clubhouse was remodeled again in 1939, this time to the design of member Kenneth Franzheim. Today none of the buildings are extant. In 1957 the Houston Country Club relocated to Tanglewood. Club member Gus Wortham purchased the abandoned location and renamed it the Houston Executive Golf Club. In

1973 the City of Houston acquired the course and renamed it the Gus Wortham Golf Course. The existing clubhouse dates to this period.

Partly because of the attraction of the Houston Country Club, the area was briefly considered to be a potential location for luxury residential development. In 1910 the Forest Hill subdivision was laid out to the design of Kansas City landscape architect Sid J. Hare. This subdivision, located directly east of Brays Bayou across from the Houston Country Club, was accessible from Forest Hill Boulevard, which began at Harrisburg Boulevard between 72nd and 73rd streets and proceeded directly south through undeveloped land before it crossed Brays Bayou and entered the subdivision. Forest Hill was the first subdivision in Houston to break from the orthogonal grid street pattern, being notable for a curving street pattern that took the form of concentric arcs.

A few large houses were built in Forest Hill, notably the Colonial revival house designed by Dallas architects Lang & Witchell at 1766 Pasadena Avenue of 1911 and the Mission style bungalow designed by W. A. Cooke for his own habitation at 1724 Alta Vista Avenue of 1912. Unfortunately, Forest Hill never fulfilled its backers' expectations. It could not compete with the development along south Main Street that included Rice University and the Shadyside subdivision of 1916. The majority of the existing houses in Forest Hill date from second half of the 1940s, when the large, one-acre properties were reduced in size and redeveloped.

**Above Left:** Aerial view of the Houston Country Club, circa 1941. Winding paths to the right are those of Forest Park Cemetery; wooded area to the left is the newly developed Houston Country Club Place; streets at lower right are those of Idylwood. The Ship Channel turning basin is faintly visible at top center.

**Above Right:** The former Houston Country Club clubhouse (Sanguinet & Staats, 1909).

**Opposite Page Top:** Dinner Bell Cafeteria building, 1955.

**Opposite Page Center:** Lroy House in Idylwood (Harry A. Turner, 1940).

**Opposite Page Bottom:** International Derrick and Equipment Company of Texas Building, 1944-45.

After the collapse of the Forest Hill project, little residential activity took place in the surrounding area. To the north, between Harrisburg Boulevard and Buffalo Bayou were the Magnolia Park Addition of 1909 and the Central Park Addition of 1912. Here a large number of modest dwellings intended for Houston Ship Channel workers were built in the 1910s and 1920s.

Large-scale residential construction did not resume south of Harrisburg Boulevard until 1928, when the Kansas City architecture firm Hare & Hare designed Idylwood subdivision, which was developed by John A. Embry directly south of the Houston Country Club. Idylwood, with its streets sensitively responding to the undulating topography of Brays Bayou on its eastern border, was designed for middle-class professionals who managed the industrial operations of the Ship Channel. It was a relatively large development of 319 houses. However, the Depression hindered construction. Most of Idylwood's houses date from the late 1930s through the 1940s. Early advertising brochures described Idylwood as "Houston's East End Residential Park."

The multiple entrances to the subdivision along South Wayside Drive are marked with rustic stone walls, thus setting it off from the surrounding neighborhoods. Several notable early modern houses were built in Idylwood. The Lawler House of 1937 designed by Swenson, Heidbreder & Bush at 6653 Wildwood Street was made of Vibrex Tile, a material that was described in the



Map by Ben Koussh

A map of the Wayside Corridor section of the East End. What was once the Houston Country Club is now the Gus Wortham Golf Course.

*Houston Post* on April 11, 1937, when the house was opened to the public, as "absolutely waterproof, completely fire-proof, lightweight, exceedingly strong, varied textures adaptable to architectural detail and unlimited colors.... This type of home is not to be confused with the concrete block type of construction." The Lroy House of 1940 designed by Harry A. Turner at 6748 Meadowlawn Street was a two-story Moderne extravaganza. The interiors still possess a wonderful mural painted on plaster of magnolia blossoms and a fallout shelter installed in the 1960s.

At about the time that the Forest Hill subdivision was still seen as a good idea, Colonel Edward F. Simms, a Kentuckian who made his fortune in the oil fields of Texas and Louisiana, settled in Houston. Sometime after 1910 he purchased several tracts of land adjacent to the west side of the Houston Country Club along what would become South Wayside Drive. According to Marguerite Johnston, author of *Houston, The Unknown City 1836-1946*, "...he built a mansion with a library, living room, dining room, and

a breakfast room, on the first floor, a maid's room off the kitchen, a wine cellar and furnace in the basement, and seven bedrooms and five bathrooms on the upper floors, as well as a big upstairs sleeping porch. He built gardens, stables, greenhouse, reflecting pools, lakes and one of Houston's first swimming pools—a big one set some distance from the house. The estate required eight gardeners and five house servants to maintain. He called it Wayside."

Simms' stucco-clad main house at 900 South Wayside Drive was accessible by a winding gravel drive. Fire insurance company maps, which were last updated in 1969, showed several additional smaller houses, an extensive collection of out-buildings, and an irregularly shaped concrete swimming pool that was designed to look like a pond.

Simms's stepdaughter Bessie married architect Kenneth Franzheim, whose office designed many of the important commercial buildings in Houston from the 1930s through the 1950s. During the years that the Franzheims were in residence at Wayside it was often the scene of prominent social gatherings. In March 1949, for

example, during the American Institute of Architects' national convention in Houston, Bessie entertained a delegation of the wives of architects from Cuba and Mexico at the house. At its peak from the 1920s through the 1940s, the Simms estate was one of the largest, most elaborate residential compounds in Houston. Over the years, though, the family sold parcels of the estate, notably the southern sections along Lawndale Avenue, which became the Houston Country Club Place subdivision and the Simms Woods subdivision.

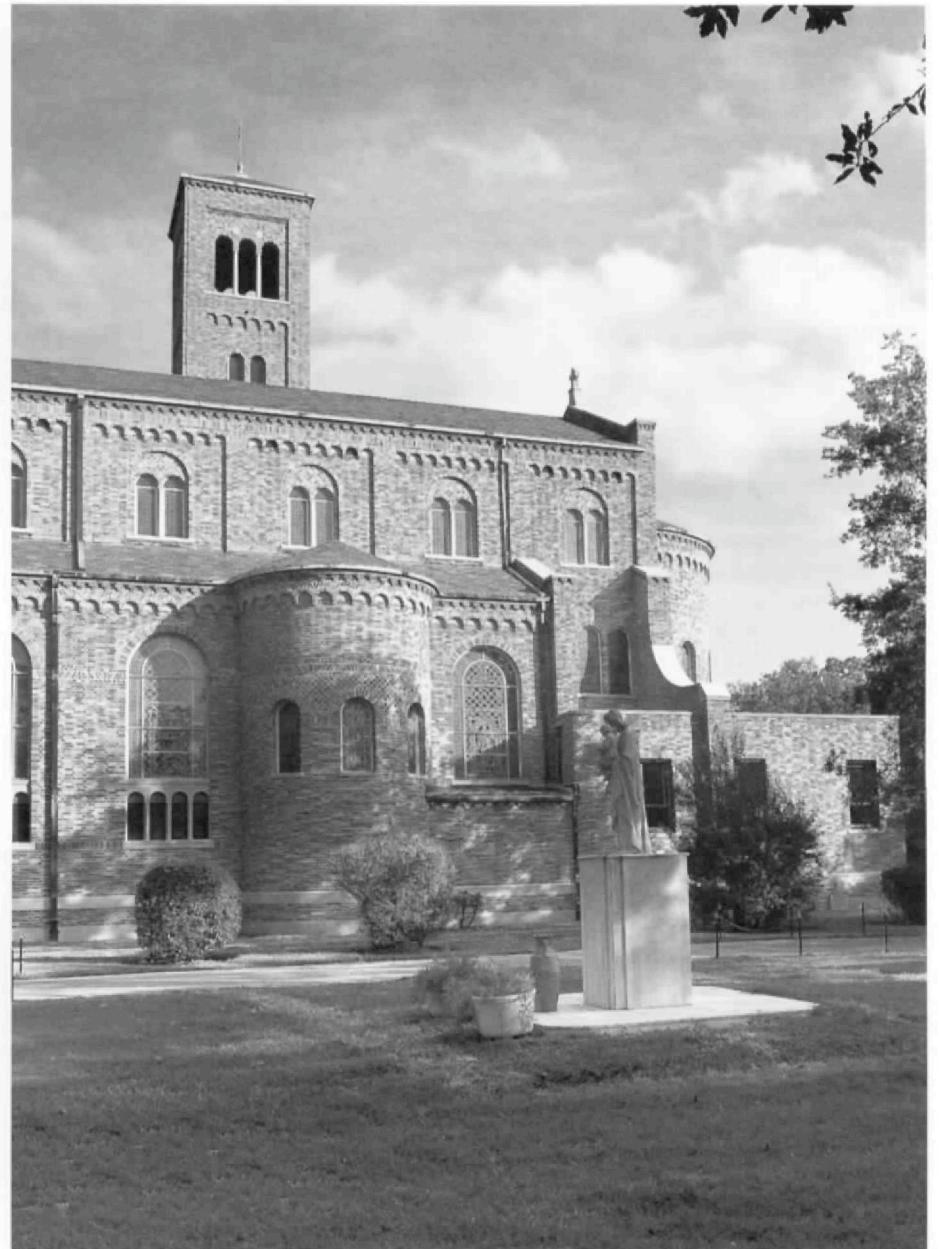
The Houston Country Club Place subdivision was begun in 1941 by developer C.E. King. The 49 acres King purchased from the Simms heirs at the corner of Lawndale Avenue and Wayside Drive constituted about half the Simms parcel. The street plan comprised long, gently curving east-west oriented blocks reminiscent of such earlier Houston subdivisions as Garden Oaks. The main entrance to Houston Country Club Place was at Villa de Matel Road and Lawndale Avenue. It was marked by two matching, monumental, red-brick gate piers. The two houses on either side used the same brick veneer,

and together with the gates made an unusually impressive architectural statement for a modest subdivision. The western gate collapsed in 1999 when a water main under it burst. The second gate was also in danger of collapse, but due to the efforts of the Houston Country Club Place Civic Club it was stabilized and repaired in 2005. Development in Houston Country Club Place was delayed due to the outbreak of World War II, and most of the houses there date to the immediate postwar years.

The small, 20-acre, 47-house Simms Woods subdivision was developed in 1946 by R.S. Collins, president of the Texestate Corporation. Its streets connect directly with those of the adjacent Houston Country Club Place, and most visitors fail to realize they are two separate developments. Simms Woods would be an unremarkable postwar subdivision were it not for several architect-designed houses built along Brookside Drive. William N. Floyd designed some of the earliest houses of his career in Simms Woods. The brick veneer Sharp House at 6327 Brookside Drive is one of his, and was one of the first six houses to be built



All photos this page by G. Lyon Photography



in the subdivision. Floyd would later make a name for himself as the Houston equivalent of progressive California developer Joseph Eichler for his involvement in several Memorial area subdivisions from the mid-1950s that had large concentrations of modern and contemporary houses.

Another architect-designed house in Simms Woods is the Miller House of 1951 at 6315 Brookside Drive, the creation of Phillip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood Jr. Willard was one of the most prolific contemporary architects in Houston in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He associated himself during his Houston years with Hood, a 1952 graduate of the University of Houston architecture program. According to an article in the *Houston Chronicle* from the time, Willard and Hood's "distinctive" Miller House was "planned to be built entirely of masonry materials throughout its structural frame, employing the use of cavity walls, tile partitions and joistile ceiling and roof structure. The cavity wall is of 4-inch face brick and 4-inch tile, with two inches of air space in the center. The roof is insulated with rigid fiberglass insulation board before the finished roofing is applied. The

design employs large plate glass openings, one-way pitched ceilings, cove lighting and the latest in electrical appliances and air conditioning."

The third architect associated with Simms Woods was Allen R. Williams Jr., who designed the Minella House (see sidebar, page 28).

Simms Woods and Houston Country Club Place were also unusual in that they quickly became a close knit Italian-American ethnic enclave. About 60 of the 156 houses in Houston County Club Place were owned by descendents of Italian immigrants, and many of these families built large houses on corner double lots in both subdivisions, dubbed "Italian houses" by local residents.

In 1922, Forest Park Cemetery was created on 49 acres of land carved out of the moribund Forest Hill subdivision along Brays Bayou. Between 1930 and 1950 it was expanded to the south across Lawndale Avenue and today comprises 350 acres with 127,000 burials. Its designer was probably Hare & Hare. Sid J. Hare, who began the firm in 1910 and was joined in partnership with his

son S. Herbert Hare, was a noted expert on cemetery design and had served as the superintendent of Forest Hill Cemetery in Kansas City from 1896 to 1902.

In the East End's Forest Park Cemetery one of the more notable buildings is the neo-Gothic, limestone-clad, reinforced-concrete framed Abbey Mausoleum, built in 1928. The wings to the north and south of it are later unsympathetic additions. The contemporary Funeral Home in the new section of the cemetery was built in 1963. Notable Houstonians buried at Forest Park Cemetery include Neils and Mellie Esperson, Jesse H. Jones, and axe-murderer Carla Fay Tucker.

In 1927 the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word moved from Galveston, where they had been located since 1867, to 70 acres of forested land south of Lawndale Avenue and east of South Wayside Drive. Maurice J. Sullivan was commissioned to design the order's new motherhouse, novitiate, administrative buildings and chapel at 6510 Lawndale Avenue. According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, the conventual chapel "is the grandest church  
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**Above Top Left:** Radetzki House in Forest Hill (Lang and Witchell, 1911).  
**Above Bottom Left:** Cooke House in Forest Hill (W.A. Cooke, 1912).  
**Above:** Villa de Motel Conventual Chapel (Maurice J. Sullivan, 1927).



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built in Houston during the 1920s. It is detailed with neo-Byzantine décor. Sullivan employed exposed aggregate concrete mosaic for the wall surfaces and Guastavino tile vaults for the chapel's ceiling. Numerous varieties of polished and colored marbles are used. Sullivan designed the stained glass windows, which were fabricated in Munich." These buildings, known as the Villa de Matel, remain in good condition today.

Another staple of the area, the giant Hughes Tool Company, was founded in 1909 by ex-Spindletop well drillers Howard R. Hughes and Walter B. Sharp. In 1917, Hughes bought out his partner and relocated to the East End. Shortly thereafter the company entered a period of great expansion. Eventually the Hughes Tool Company's industrial complex in the East End encompassed the land between Polk Avenue, Hughes Street, the Evergreen Cemetery, and Capitol Avenue. Its entrance was at 300 Hughes near Slaughterpen Bayou.

Several notable parts of the complex remain, among them the former International Derrick and Equipment of Texas Company building of 1930 and

1944-45 at 5425 Polk. This polychrome exercise in Moderne architecture was rehabilitated by the City of Houston for city government offices.

Due to increased production at the Hughes Tool Company during World War II, William G. Farrington built the Lawndale Village Apartments in 1944 on Lawndale Avenue at the southeast corner of Forest Hill. Because steel was unavailable, the foundations of these two-story garden apartments were made of extra-thick concrete with no reinforcement. The exterior walls were made of unglazed cream and glazed yellow ceramic tiles. The interior walls were also made of ceramic tiles covered in plaster. They are a good example of the high quality of site planning, architectural design, and construction of multi-family residential projects during this era.

Howard R. Hughes Jr., who inherited ownership of the company at his father's death in 1924 and was well known for eccentric schemes, began an interesting side business in 1933 at the behest of R. C. Kuldell, the president of Hughes Tool. That side business

was the Gulf Brewing Company. The brewing plant located at 5301-3 Polk Avenue produced Grand Prize beer until 1963. Belgian born brewmeister Franz H. Brogniez, vice president in charge of production at Gulf Brewing and father of noted Houston architect Raymond H. Brogniez, designed the layout for a large warehouse and bottling plant in 1946, from which architectural drawings were prepared by Lloyd & Morgan.

The new plant, capable of handling 660,000 bottles a day, was described in the *Houston Post* as a "model of the newest and most efficient brewing and bottling operations." The building, clad in corrugated asbestos panels and brick veneer, was located in the northeast sector of the complex facing Capitol Avenue. Today it is only partially used and in a state of advanced disrepair.

In 1987 Hughes Tool Company merged with Baker International to become Baker Hughes, the third-largest well services company in the world after Halliburton and Schlumberger. Baker Hughes has since reconfigured part of the original Hughes Tool complex as the Central City Industrial Park and now

leases their old buildings to a variety of small industrial manufacturing concerns.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s there was substantial commercial development on the blocks around the intersection of South Wayside Drive and Harrisburg Boulevard between the working class subdivisions to the north and the middle-class subdivisions to the south. Sears & Roebuck hired Kenneth Franzheim to design a new store and auto service station on the block bounded by Harrisburg Boulevard, South Wayside Drive, Capitol Avenue, and 69th Street. Completed in 1947, the building shared many traits with Franzheim's better known buildings from late 1940 through the 1950s such as the Foley's department store of 1947 at 1100 Main Street, the Prudential Building at 1100 Holcombe Boulevard of 1952, the San Jacinto Building of 1952 (formerly at 822 Main Street), and the Bank of the Southwest Building of 1956 at 910 Travis.

While the formal design of these buildings was retardataire, they were remarkable for the way that Franzheim and his designers ingeniously accommodated complex programs using the

**Top Right:** The former Wayside Sears Building (Kenneth Franzheim, 1947).

**Bottom Right:** The former Industrial State Bank (MacKie & Kamrath, 1949).

**Opposite Page, Top Left:** Lawler House in Idylwood (Swanson, Heidbreder & Bush, 1937).

**Opposite Page, Bottom Left:** Miller House in Simms Woods (Phillip G. Willard and Lucian T. Hood, 1951).

**Opposite Page, Top Right:** The Weisenthal Clinic (George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce, 1949).

**Opposite Page, Bottom Right:** The Bettis Corporation Building in Supply Row, 1948.

latest technology and exceptional tectonic detailing. Geoffrey Baker and Bruno Furnaro described the parking system for the Wayside Drive Sears building in their 1951 book *Shopping Centers, Design and Operation* as having, "a controller high up on the store to oversee the whole parking area. When one-way aisles (with 60° stalls) are as long as this, it becomes exceedingly difficult for the arriving motorist to see from one end if there is an empty stall. So at the entrance of each aisle is a traffic light managed by the controller. As long as there is a single empty stall in the aisle the light at its end will show a green arrow. When the aisle is full the controller will switch that light to red. Were it not for this control it would scarcely be feasible to economize in space by emptying the aisles directly on to a public street, instead of having a service road with the site." The building is no longer extant.

In 1949, when the Industrial State Bank by MacKie & Kamrath at 6756 Capitol Avenue opened diagonally across the street from the Wayside Sears store, the *Houston Post* noted that it was "said to be one of the most modern banking buildings in the United States." The steel-framed, brick-clad building was distinguished by its drive-in banking windows facing the parking lot. Those windows were protected by a five-foot cantilevered concrete overhang. Inside there was a saw-tooth arrangement of teller cages to simplify standing in line. Today the bank has been altered almost beyond recognition.

At 200 North Wayside Drive, two blocks past the Wayside Sears, George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce designed the Weisenthal Clinic of 1949. The front wall and planting box of this charming building was made of Arizona pink ledge stone veneer, while the side and rear walls were clad in corrugated asbestos panels. It appears to be in relatively good condition today, except for the incongruous faux stained-glass front door and scalloped shingles in some of the window openings.

An early office park prototype development with 17 properties, Supply Row Center, was laid out by the Texestate Corporation along Supply Row at about the same time that Simms Woods was being developed. It was located between Polk Avenue, South Wayside Drive, Capitol Avenue, and Hughes Street—

close, but not directly accessible, to the Hughes Tool Company complex. Today it contains a collection of substantial modernist commercial buildings in various states of repair housing a variety of small businesses. A good example is the Bettis Corporation Building of 1948 at 320 South 66th Street. Perhaps the most architecturally significant building in Supply Row Center, though, was the Kay Manufacturing Building at 440 South 66th Street of 1953, built for a manufacturer of steel mattress springs. Its architect is unknown, but according to *Houston* magazine, "The big factory building is the first completely pre-cast concrete building in the entire Southwest to utilize pre-stressed members ... the entire structure of 64,000 square feet costing approximately \$750,000 was erected in about a week's time." The Kay Manufacturing building also featured one of the earliest installations in Houston of tilt-up concrete wall panels.

At 960 South Wayside, below Harrisburg Boulevard and between the Simms estate and Houston Country Club Place, Lloyd & Morgan designed the Parker Memorial Methodist Church of 1949. Of this \$400,000 church, William Ward Watkin said in his 1951 book *Planning and Building the Modern Church* that, "It seems to have all the simpleness of form that was characteristic of the Colonial types, yet it is definitely a modern design." Over the years the congregation shrank, and the building was finally abandoned in 1984. It was later sold to the Houston Independent School District, which demolished it to make way for the postmodern Edna M. Carillo Elementary School of 1993.

In 1955 an unknown architect designed the shopping center at 6525 Lawndale Avenue that contains the Dinner Bell Cafeteria (a picture of which can be seen at the beginning of this story). A true East End establishment, it has been in continuous operation for over 50 years. The design of this restaurant and adjacent shops is quite sophisticated. The end closest to Lawndale, with its pink brick veneer laid in a stack bond with integrated planters and narrow clerestory windows under a large overhang with a raked fascia, gives an idea of how the entire center must have originally looked. The interiors of the Dinner Bell are a trip, and the food is not bad either.



Photo from *Shopping Centers, Design and Operation*, 1951. Courtesy Ben Koussh.



Photo by Dorsey & Peters

In the 1960s and 1970s the area entered a period of decline, and several large apartment complexes were built on land purchased from the former Simms estate north of Houston Country Club Place. The Royal Wayside Apartments of 1963 at 1010 South Wayside Drive and the Lawndale Gardens Apartments of 1975 at 910 Fairoaks Drive are a series of two-story, brick-veneer tenement barracks. When they're compared to William G. Farrington's tree-shaded Lawndale Village Apartments of 1944, it is apparent how much architectural design sensitivity was lost over the three decades that separate them.

One positive event that occurred in the area during the 1970s was the cancellation of the ill-conceived Harrisburg Freeway. In 1969 the Texas Transportation Commission accepted the Houston City Planning Commission's 1960 proposal for a new freeway to connect the La Port Freeway to the Central Business District Loop—U.S. 59. Community activist Richard Holgin

led a seemingly quixotic fight against the city and the Texas Department of Transportation to stop a freeway that promised to decimate the low-income Hispanic neighborhoods along the Harrisburg corridor. In 1976 the Harrisburg Freeway was officially suspended, and in 1992 it was at last deleted from the City of Houston's Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan. Thus the East End was spared the disastrous effects of freeway construction that decimated the Second Ward and First Ward. Today, Harrisburg Boulevard retains many of its old buildings, and is an active, if in some places shabby, commercial corridor.

In a city where developers are the ultimate arbiters of taste, the Wayside corridor has benefited doubly. Not only was the planning of its developments superior, but it supported a collection of distinguished examples of conventional and modern architectural design that was almost unparalleled in Houston. Other parts of the city could do worse than learn from its example. ■