



THE TEXAS ROOM DISPATCH

A Publication of Friends of the Texas Room

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In September 2002, several individuals who frequently use the archival and historical collections in the Julia B. Ideson Building and who have a deep interest in Texas and local history met to discuss the feasibility of forming a "Friends" group for these collections.

Such a support group will enhance this area of the Houston Public Library, not only in raising its public visibility and use but, and perhaps of greater significance, in emphasizing its importance to the library administration.

A second meeting was held in October, and a Board of Directors was formed consisting of Betty Trapp Chapman, Dorothy Knox Houghton, Elizabeth Whitlow, Marvin Rich, and George Werner, with Marks Hinton as the registered agent. The name, Friends of the Texas Room, was chosen since this location is an identifiable place where all of the historical materials are accessed and used. The group received its Certificate of Incorporation from the State of Texas on December 2, 2002.

It is now time for a meeting to further organize by electing officers and making plans for our work. Please mark your calendar now for our first meeting:

7 p.m. Tuesday, January 28, 2003. The Long Row building (formerly the Tea Room) of the Heritage Society in Sam Houston Park. Corner of Allen Parkway and Bagby, near the Houston Public Library. Parking available in both the lots by the Long Row and behind the Kellum-Noble House on Allen Parkway.

Texas Room Transports Visitors Into Heart of Houston Heritage by Betty T. Chapman. (Reprinted from Houston Business Journal, November 1999)

A walk through the doors seen here can produce an adventure of unparalleled dimensions for anyone interested in the past. The Texas and Local History Department of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center-an arm of the Houston Public Library-contains countless gems of information on what has made Houston the city it is today. Whether one is interested in people or places or events, materials are there for exploration.

The department, known informally as the Texas Room, houses a collection of over 1500 maps of Houston and Texas. Many are original of historical or cartographic significance; a few are unique. One of the earliest is a map of New Spain, showing its configuration in 1561; the oldest Houston map is an 1836 hand-drawn one of the original survey of the town site. There are also uncounted sets of topographic maps, block maps,

land grant maps, planning maps, fire insurance maps, flood plain maps, and others. Aerial photographs dating to 1935 document the city's sprawl through once-vacant land. Among the more revealing maps are those of the Sanborn Map Company, which provided fire insurance information. Each building on each block is encoded with the dimensions, materials, uses, and occupancy of that particular structure.

To discover who lived on each block, turn to the City Directories. They span the years from 1866 to 1986 and are a genuine treasure trove of information. Commerce and industry, government and business, organizations and institutions are all included in these directories along with the individual resident listings for each year. It is entirely possible to recreate segments of the city by extracting pieces of the puzzle from these informative books.

To recapture the news of the past, a researcher can roll the microfilm machines. Nineteenth century newspapers abound here. Scrapbooks have been filled with clippings of later years-from accounts of the famous and the not-so-famous to articles dealing with everything from Airplanes to the Zoo.

And, of course, these materials are in addition to literally thousands of printed volumes. Shelves are lined with books and periodicals on every aspect of life in Texas, including a complete set of Texas Almanacs dating from 1857 and a whole section of nothing but biographies.

The Archives and Manuscript Department of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, housed in the same building, also offers extraordinary opportunities to researchers. The manuscript collection contains the papers of Houston individuals, businesses, organizations, institutions, and government. The extensive photographic collection-over three million images-reveals Houston during the past century, while the architectural archives document much of our physical façade. Whatever your interest may be, there are items to pique your curiosity, stretch your mind and expand your knowledge.

The building housing these materials is a treasure itself. Dedicated in 1926, the Julia Ideson Building (named for the library's first director) served as Houston's central library for fifty years. In 1977 it was designated an historical landmark on The National Register of Historic Places. Two years later, after extensive restoration, it received a new role as the library's center for historical records.

Boston architectural firm Cram & Adams, which had designed the first buildings at Rice Institute, was commissioned in 1922 to plan a new library for the city. The style ultimately selected was the Spanish Renaissance Revival, chosen not only for its visual appeal but for its indirect association with the colonial past of the southwestern United States. The building's interior included red tile floors, dark woodwork, richly carved columns, arched openings, and an ornamental coffered ceiling. The furniture was made of dark stained oak. The children's department was outfitted with shelves, tables, and chairs scaled for young ones and ornamented with carved replicas of figures from traditional stories. All of this is visible in a stroll through the building, along with some WPA-sponsored artwork produced by local artists in the 1930s.

The library was to have been the cornerstone of a proposed civic center. However, the plan did not materialize as conceived and when a new city hall was finally built in the late 1930s, it was of moderne design, instead of Spanish Renaissance Revival.

It is fitting, however, that a building with so much history is now the repository for one of the most comprehensive urban archives and research centers in the United States. A journey to the Julia Ideson Building transports you to the very heart of Houston's heritage.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately the National Register Plaque long-ago disappeared, and needs to be replaced. "The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's inventory of properties deemed worthy of preservation. It is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect our historic and archeological resources. The National Park Service (NPS) maintains the National Register, which is administered in Texas by the Texas Historical Commission (THC), the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and is part of its effort to promote preservation statewide.

The National Register was developed to recognize historic places and persons who contributed to our country's heritage. These properties — whether districts, sites, buildings, structures or objects — are architecturally, archeologically or historically significant for their associations with important persons or events.

The National Register is designed to include properties of importance in every locality, not just great national landmarks. — ”

WHO WAS JULIA BEDFORD IDESON? Born on July 15, 1880, in Hastings, Nebraska, she was the daughter of John Castree and Rosalie (Beasman) Ideson. Moving to Houston as a child, she attended the first library science program offered by the University of Texas. Pioneer librarian and civic activist, she was appointed librarian for the new Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library in 1903, a position she held for more than forty years. While on a visit to Pennsylvania, Julia Ideson died on July 15, 1945. To learn more, see The New Handbook of Texas (six volumes. The Texas State Historical Association, Austin, 1996).

PEOPLE GOOD TO KNOW

Rolando M. Romo was appointed Manager of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) of the Houston Public Library in July 2002. In his new position he will manage the daily operations of the Archives and Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, and the Texas Room. A UT graduate with a library degree from the University of Arizona, Rolando was the founder and first president of the Tejano Association for Historical Preservation in 1985 and continues to serve as that organization's president emeritus.

Will Howard, of East Texas stock from Marshall, Harrison County, has been with the Houston Public Library's Texas and Local History Department for fifteen years, where he is presently the supervisor. He studied librarianship at the University of Texas where he began his specialty in Texana some thirty years ago. He has many library-associated activities to his credit, and is the current vice chair/chair-elect of the Texas Library Association's Archives and Local History Roundtable.

UPCOMING CENTENNIAL. The Houston Public Library will celebrate 100 years of existence in 2004. A committee has been put together to begin planning events, projects, etc. for the entire year. Betty Chapman is chairing the History Committee, and some of the preliminary plans in that area are: a publication utilizing the photographs in the collections, exhibits at both downtown and at the branches, and securing a Texas Historical Marker for the library system. The centennial observance will give an opportunity to showcase these materials and, hopefully, make them more visible to the public. Watch for further news

Those with computers may access the Houston Public Library on the Internet at
<http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/hpl/index.html>

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