

NINA CULLINAN PAPERS

Filmed by the Archives of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution. Lent for filming
by Miss Nina Cullinan, Houston, Texas in
March, 1979.

NINA CULLINAN PAPERS

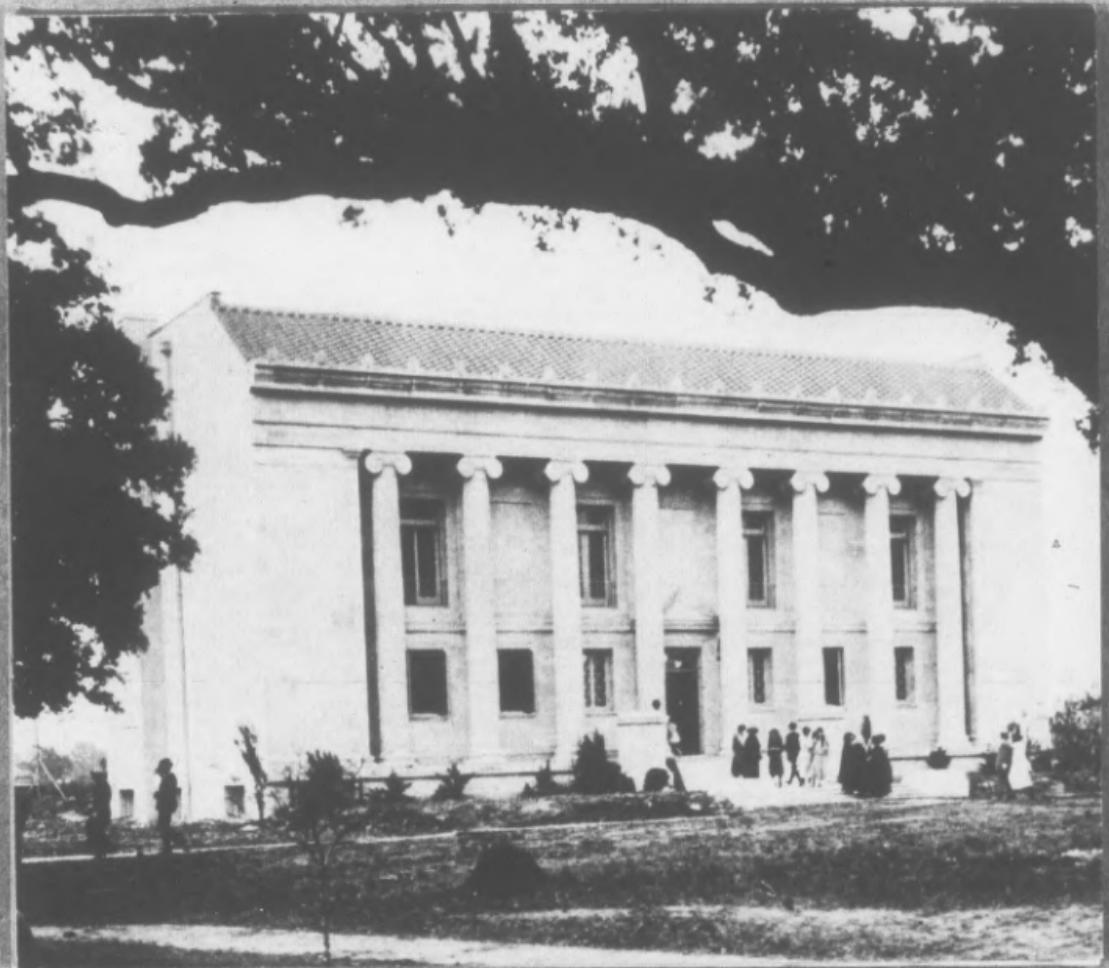
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3. Photographs

Willa Gullion

Cupping

1904



The Board of Trustees and the Director
of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

invite you to attend

a champagne reception

commemorating the Museum's Fiftieth Anniversary

Friday, April 12, 1974

5:30 to 7:00 p. m.

South Garden

Art

The Wrong Climate

By CAMPBELL GEESLIN

Last spring the Contemporary Arts Association arranged a panel discussion in which artist-members were supposed to talk about Houston's cultural environment.

Two of the five members insisted that Houston was terrible. The other three said that it made no difference at all where they lived. But of the five who took part in that program, the painter, the musician and the actor-director have removed themselves to more favorable climates. Only the writer and poet remain—and the latter insisted from the beginning that residence in Houston is irrelevant.

Guy Johnson, the painter, claimed that he got along in Houston perfectly well, but he has since gone to a teaching post in the East.

THE NUMBER OF serious, inventive artists we have in Houston has been reduced to an alarming degree, and I, upon reflection, am not surprised.

What does Houston offer the serious artist?

James Johnson Sweeney discontinued the Houston artists annual exhibits when he took over the Museum of Fine Arts. The big Southwest Painting and Sculpture Exhibit two years ago included the work of only five Houstonians. Mr Sweeney has purchased a painting by Dick Wray for the permanent collection and accepted a large painting by James Boynton.

The Contemporary Arts Museum — back when Don Barthelme was director — exhibited paintings by Dick Wray, James Boynton and Guy Johnson.

Since Barthelme left, the Houston artist has not been neglected by the CAA. There has been an art rental exhibit, and work by Houstonians, in the collections of Houstonians, were included in an acquisitions show.

BUT I'M NOT sure these gave the artists who were included either much prestige or satisfaction.

The late Dr Jermayne MacAgy had work by Jim Love and Guy Johnson in some of her exhibits at the University of Saint Thomas. Dr MacAgy had taste and following of sorts and her interest in a local artist had meaning.

But where is a Houston artist to turn for recognition and acceptance?

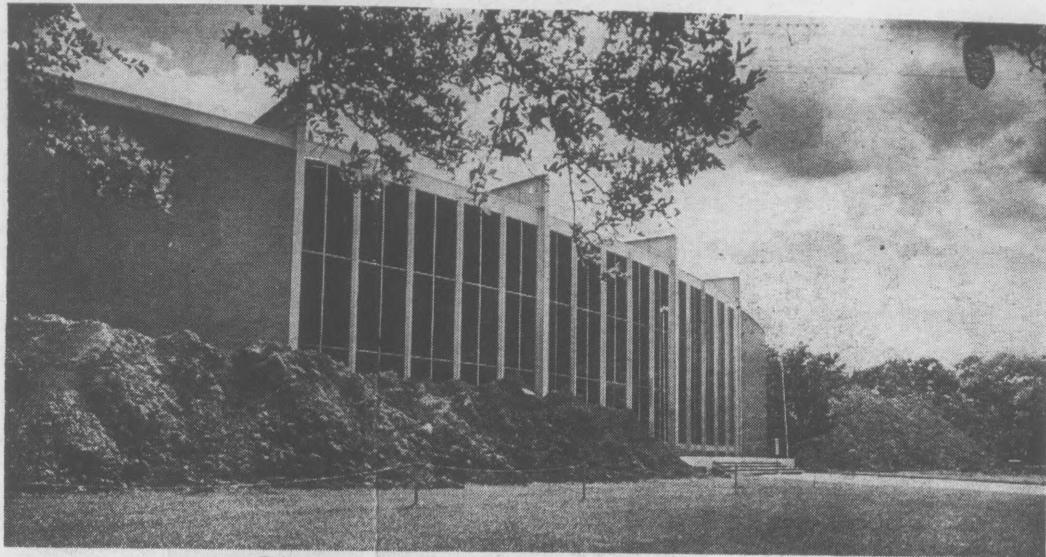
An exhibit in a gallery isn't always the answer. I have learned that any artist the Louisiana Gallery chooses to exhibit is worth going to see. So an exhibit there does offer some prestige.

But the other galleries in town will occasionally show work that is grossly inept, and an exhibit any place is a chancey thing. In some, a painter's work is hung with little style or consideration, often among another artist's pots or sculpture.

WORSE THAN that, many Houston artists come away from an exhibit at a gallery only to complain bitterly to me—and everyone else in earshot — that they have been mistreated in some way or another. Paintings are lost. Payment is slow. Or perhaps the artist is never paid. Only one or two paintings are sold. The gallery doesn't even make back the cost of printing invitations to an opening that cost a lot more.

Reviews in Houston newspapers are brief, and most artists find them superficial or irrelevant.

What New York has for the artist that Houston doesn't have is obvious: More museums than any other city in the U.S. and a constant flow of changing exhibits there and at galleries. There is talk about art. Two major newspapers treat it with some seriousness. There are well-known collectors who buy paintings, collectors who seek out the newest. To be



ARE THESE THE MONUMENTAL EARTH SCULPTURES OF RAFAEL OCCINI?
A New Focal Point for Cultural Houston?

—Post Photo

purchased by one of them can mean a recognition that is exceedingly valuable.

Obviously, Houston can never duplicate the cultural environment of New York.

BUT I HAVE on my desk a handsome book called "The Artist's Environment: West Coast" that served as a catalogue for an exhibit more than a year ago at the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art in Fort Worth.

The introduction outlines the history of something called "the San Francisco school, just as there was a New York school eager to equate itself with Paris."

It began when Douglas MacAgy became the director of the California School of Fine Arts in 1945. "Here he played a dynamic role, leading the interest in San Francisco away from the American scene of the Depression years and the WPA epoch, and toward a new internationalism and the influence of the surrealists. These changes of emphasis were in turn reflected in a remarkable series of elaborate, often thematic, exhibitions organized by Jermayne MacAgy, who was in charge of contemporary exhibitions at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor."

MacAgy had David Park and Hassel Smith on the faculty. He brought in Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko. Then Park began to back away from abstraction into figure painting and the California school made its most notable contribution with Park, Elmer Bischoff, Diebenkorn, Morris Broderson, Nathan Oliveira and others.

Houston has no school, museum or gallery at the present that is playing any role of significance for Houston artists. It's no wonder they flee.

January 12, '67

Big Step Forward for Museum

The Museum of Fine Arts of Houston is getting a \$1 million gift from the Alice Pratt Brown Museum Fund. This will provide that institution with about \$40,000 in additional income each year.

These funds may be used as museum trustees see fit. This generous gesture comes at a crucial moment in the history of the museum. With Miss Nina Cullinan's gift of the big hall in memory of her parents almost 10 years ago, the museum was on its way to becoming the major art institution in the Southwest. This growth has been continual ever since.

James Johnson Sweeney was brought to Houston by the trustees, and his careful addi-

tions to the permanent collection have given the museum international recognition.

THESE NEW FUNDS which the Brown Foundation, Inc, is providing mark another major step forward for the museum. This kind of gift creates new opportunities and a new challenge for the museum's board and director to do special exhibitions, to make purchases for the permanent collection, or to handle the problems that are always a part of a growing museum. This is the best possible kind of gift for the museum at this particular time in its history.

All Houstonians will be richer because of it.

THE COMPLETE BOOK

The Face of Houston -- By GEORGE FUERMANN

THEY SAY it got its name from Scotland. We know it was named for Samuel Houston, that vain and touchy God's assistant, that Indian-flavored, whisky-seasoned saga-seeker, that friend of Andrew Jackson who was an American Congressman and governor before becoming the first president of the Republic of Texas. Now that we see the modern city of Houston, now that we know something of its character and its aspirations, we know that such a city could not have found a larger man, or better one, to be named for.

Centuries before Samuel, one Sir Hugh of Padivian, a Norman knight, helped William the Conqueror acquire England. His reward was a strip of land lying along the Scottish border. The Scots, perhaps unable to pronounce "Padivian," called him Sir Hugh and his castle Hugh's town, or Hughtown. The descendants of this progenitor of the Texas hero came to call themselves Houston.

THE CITY of that name, now 126 years old, is still not fixed or measured, perhaps less so than any other American city, but this restless city named for a restless hero must have one place for its dot on maps. It lies a hundred jet minutes north and east of the invigorating sky-heights of Mexico City, and by motor half that time, or 50 miles inland from the humid middle coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Houston spreads at random over the Texas Gulf Plain and so it is flat—as flat as pancake batter dropped on a griddle. The land's flatness is what first strikes and often disheartens the newcomer. No part seems higher than another; indeed the county rises only a bit more than 300 feet in 50 miles. The land's only natural features are the serpentine depressions made by creeks and bayous and the San Jacinto River. Even many Texans, mainly those coming from the state's hilly central region, are affected by this flatness, but the newcomers from the East and the West, hilly and mountainous regions, are the ones who are put off, often for long, by the unrelieved low-lying table that is Houston's site.

THE CITY ITSELF is another matter. From the center it is 20 to 25 miles across Houston in any direction. Our Main Street measures 19 miles. And Houston has taken legal steps to become substantially larger in area than the state of Rhode Island. The city has annexed, though not finally, all the remaining unincorporated land in Harris County, that would add 1,150



GEORGE FUERMANN
Author, Post Columnist



OWEN JOHNSON
He Took the Pictures

of the most extravagant night-sights in the world from the air, a glittering, twinkling Oz of lighted colors, the night's open jewel box, a city of the fancy that could never really exist, but almost does.

ITS PROFILE, at times its

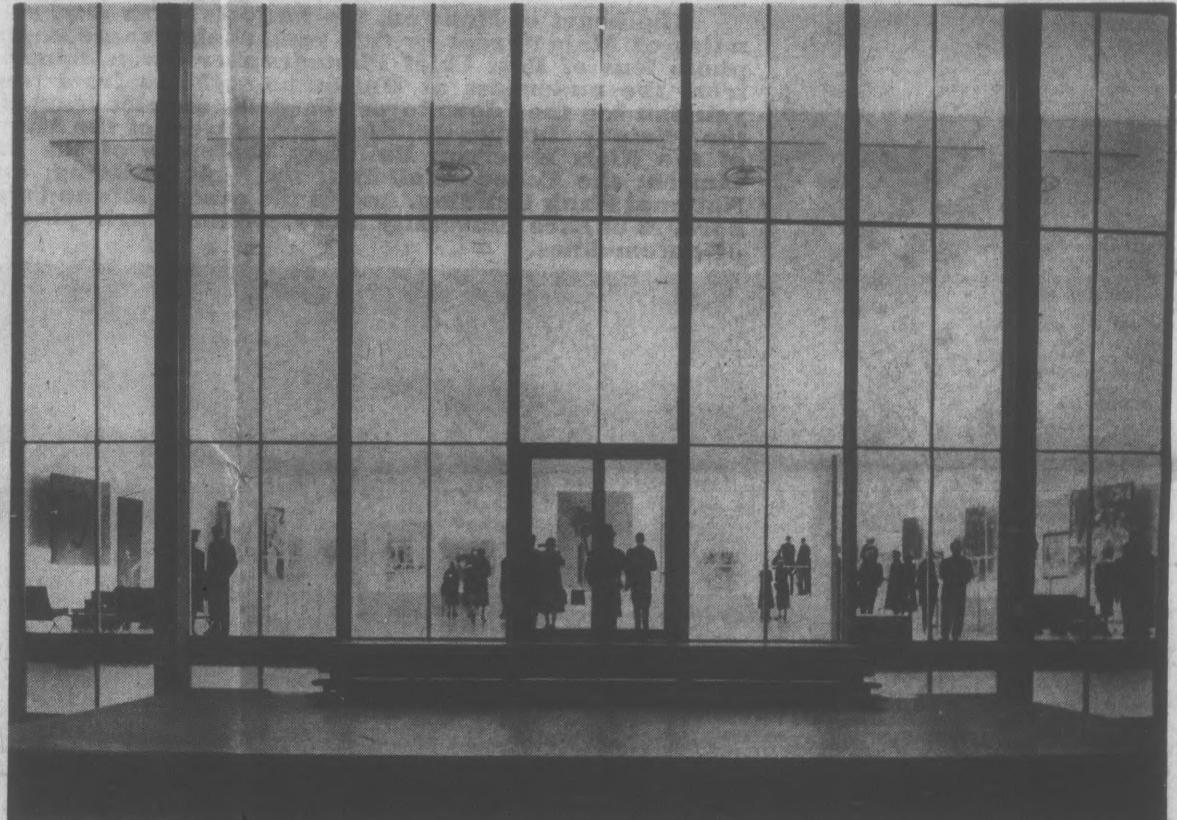
silhouette, is new and now begins to meet the sky well. These high-risers, the sky's slender glass and metal pillars, are impressive in mass but undistinguished singly with few exceptions. But throughout America, and now abroad, too, every city possesses this same but varied sign of success. Only a man who last saw Houston 50 years ago, or five years ago, blinks with

monoliths, the ruins of some age of pious giants, melancholy relics of a worship utterly meaningless to our day.

.. THE GIFTED Irishman Sean O'Faolan, writing less gracefully than in the stories that won his fame, said Houston's "business center looks as if some superbillionaire had mail-ordered a dozen blocks of Manhattan COD, to be dumped down among the old tin cans and slithering water rats of what was once Buffalo Bayou." He added that Houston "is an enormously exciting town with its own bizarre beauty. I remember vividly its brief streets of skyscrapers, so often crowded by clouds, ending as abruptly as if cut off by an ax. They gave me the sensation that this is a . . . city gambling with time."

A CITY endures sudden growth to its peril. One hazard is much harder to overcome than the obvious one of trying to build and pay for roads, water and sewer systems, schools, hospitals, libraries, and the like fast enough to care for the human flood. Half a million persons lived here in 1940; in two decades the figure rose to a million and a quarter. Such quick doubling and near-redoubling of the population affects a people's collective nervous system. Urban life is an almost impossible condition anyway; to have it created in a few breaths further burdens the mass psyche. New York and London are incomparably larger than Houston, but their populations expanded gradually rather than at once. Here soon will be a city of a million and a half persons, yet to be a second-generation Houstonian is a distinction one making a man an "old" Houstonian. Perhaps this sudden surge in population is what puts the face of Houston a little on edge.

ANOTHER THING, but part of the same idea, is that Houston conveys a sense of energy—not speed but energy. One feels that he had better get on with it, not so much with life itself as with whatever he works at or hopes to do, and no nonsense, if you please, about relief or idleness. We all take vacations, of course yet even va-



CULLINAN HALL, NEW ENTRANCE TO THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, WAS OPENED IN 1959

pects its leaders to arrange to die of old age. Not that anyone is expected to live and die for good old Houston. But Houston—that sense of energy again—expects a man to hit the deck running and to keep on running with no times-out, especially none for early dying. Yet Houston contains little municipal Babbletry. Here soon will be a city of a million and a half persons, yet to be a second-generation Houstonian is a distinction one making a man an "old" Houstonian. Perhaps this sudden surge in population is what puts the face of Houston a little on edge.

HOUSTON gives you a feeling of excitement—a competitive excitement, really, like a scoreless ball game at the top of the ninth inning. That is not to say that this intensity affects everyone, or even the majority of us consciously, but Houston life is purposeful and heads-up, which are attributes of the young. The quality is contagious. This stir has by no means created a model society, or even one that another city would necessarily do well to imitate. But it perfectly coincides with Houston's time of life, with the city's rise. In

keeping the city more or less free of professional hoodlums, but the main thing is this: the men and women who lead the city simply have never relinquished what must be called vigilance.

STILL, Houston is a city, and anyone with even a trace of prudence will never leave his keys in the car when he parks it on the street, though many optimists continue to do so. He would do well to lock his car doors too, and his house or apartment as well. The gift of colorful crime, executed with the imagination shown, say, by the citizens of London and Paris, has been denied Houston since its frontier days and such flavor as our crime now offers comes from certain ancient swindles and from crimes of passion, an alarming number of which are committed by wives who murder their husbands. Many explanations of this husband-slaughter have been made—the humidity, the frontier's shadow, and so on—but one explanation may be that our

dead, three thousand injured. But not Houston. Even oil booms the big ones, which stimulated Houston's earlier success, occurred elsewhere. Houston has never been a maker of history but often a beneficiary of it.

WE ARE NOT in the least a past-minded city, not even in a state whose remarkable past has long been a concern, often an obsession, of many thousands. It was once so in Houston too, but that interest has to some extent withdrawn in the presence of new hopes, of the new immigrants. Great expectations never look backward, and Houstonians now have little concern for the past. After all, their wagon is hitched to the moon.

WHEN YOU evaluate Houston's character, which is to say the character of the whole people, you find that the past does concern us very much, not the historical past but our emotional conception of the social past. We object to the way things are going, not all of us

able outcome of most issues. We wish, most of us, that we could run the country, the state, and the city without controls, without taxes, without government. We have never had a dominant industrial labor population, and it is possible that Houston's ratio of white-collar workers to the total population is the highest of American cities. Most of us think like millionaires; our reactions are those of the rich. It is hard to explain two contrary facts about Houston: the American city with the youngest median age is one of the most conservative of those cities. As a group, the young in Houston, and by young I mean under forty, are not in the least speculative philosophically or politically. Our young men share the social convictions of the old. One puzzles at another contradiction: that a people yearning for the predictability of the past, a people as materialistic as a pawnbroker, could live with a gusto that gives pause.

FAMILIARITY fails to clar-

ifies that the city's character must be changing, and then one sees that it is still being formed rather than changed. The frontier, though all but invisible now, still affects our character. The Houstonian believes that fences are meant to exclude others more than himself. "No Smoking" signs on city buses are ignored; traffic "Stop" signs are taken as a dare more than a warning. To zone our city might interfere with our freedom—our freedom to clean up on some land we hope to own some day. So we vote against zoning and risk living next door to a filling station or a hamburger stand or a laundry. In religion we preferred the strong hand of Calvinism, the fear of hell's fire, until fairly recently, say fifteen or twenty years ago, when the more liberal faiths, and especially Roman Catholicism, began an ascendancy that continues. Still, the stark electric sign high above the First Baptist Church, which daily prompts the crowds at one of the prin-

ter it is 20 to 25 miles across Houston in any direction. Our Main Street measures 19 miles. And Houston has taken legal steps to become substantially larger in area than the state of Rhode Island. The city has annexed, though not finally, all the remaining unincorporated land in Harris County; that would add 1,150 square miles to the existing 349. As to numbers, one of every eight Texans lives in Houston's metropolitan area, and our number increases by 50,000 every year. How big we are in that way, and how dreadfully big we are supposed to become, are no longer material, not since the One Million settled in. From now on its is only a matter of degree.

ONE'S FIRST impression of Houston may depend upon how and when he arrives, unless he is a child. A child, as a rule, will approve at once—a good omen. But an immigrant adult, whose memory of and whose ties to his former home are more resistant to new experiences, whose sense of comparison is sharp and critical at such times, should arrive for the first time between late October and late May if during the day, but any month or any weather will do if he arrives by air at night. For Houston offers one

cross highway, the two slender glass and metal pillars, are impressive en masse but undistinguished singly with few exceptions. But throughout America, and now abroad, too, every city possesses this same but varied sign of success. Only a man who last saw Houston 50 years ago, or five years ago, blinks with astonishment when he sees it anew, but he then compares Houston with its former self and not with some other city. Yet this skyline has aroused more discourse by the famous than it would seem to deserve.

THE BRITON J. B. Priestley, a gossipy fuss-budget in search of admiration that he was spared in Texas, was floored by the sight, which he considered one dusk from his room high in the Shamrock Hilton Hotel, five miles south of the skyline: "The (Houston) skyscrapers looked quite different from their prototypes in New York, the only city I know where they seem natural and inevitable. Here . . . widely separated in illimitable room, they do not seem like any kind of urban building it is possible to imagine . . . and as I stared at them now, their bulk increasing in the sunset air, in the haze in which the distant streets dwindled and then vanished, they looked like inexplicable and monstrous

or the same idea, is that Houston conveys a sense of energy—not speed but energy. One feels that he had better get on with it, not so much with life itself as with whatever he works at or hopes to do, and no nonsense, if you please, about relief or idleness. We all take vacations, of course yet even vacations are often thought of, perhaps unconsciously as brief desertions from duty, as minor peccadilloes. Call it the Houston conscience, which can never bring itself to approve of wasted leisure. Let pleasure be taken quickly, and make it cohere, if possible, with important things.

THAT SUGGESTS a shocking materialism, but it means nothing of the kind. The Houston conscience, something of a bully, must be the reason Houston mourns an early death with a sorrow that includes disappointment. A man who dies young simply fails to fulfill his contract. Two important Houston men, one old one young, died a little apart a while back. Both were uncommonly able men, both were influential in the city and also in the nation, and both were as rich as could be. Within weeks the younger man was forgotten; the old man still is revered by some, still cursed by others. Houston ex-

pects now offers comes from certain ancient swindles and from crimes of passion, an alarming number of which are committed by wives who murder their husbands. Many explanations of this husband-slaughter have been made—the humidity, the frontier's shadow, and so on—but one explanation may be that our juries are loath to punish the wives. Houston bears many marks of the South, whose white women all are pure.

ONE SPLENDID circumstance of Houston life is seldom mentioned, and perhaps we take it for granted. One must beware of taking wooden nickels in any big city, but Houston still is relatively free of the rackets and organized vices that enrich the underworld in older cities. Houston will give you every imaginable excuse for leaving you low and wet if your neighborhood needs better drainage, for the embarrassing circumstance that our two largest parks are so near the silk-stocking areas instead of where they are needed, for having a police force adequate to cope with two-thirds of our population. But we have no underworld worthy of the name. Many things contribute

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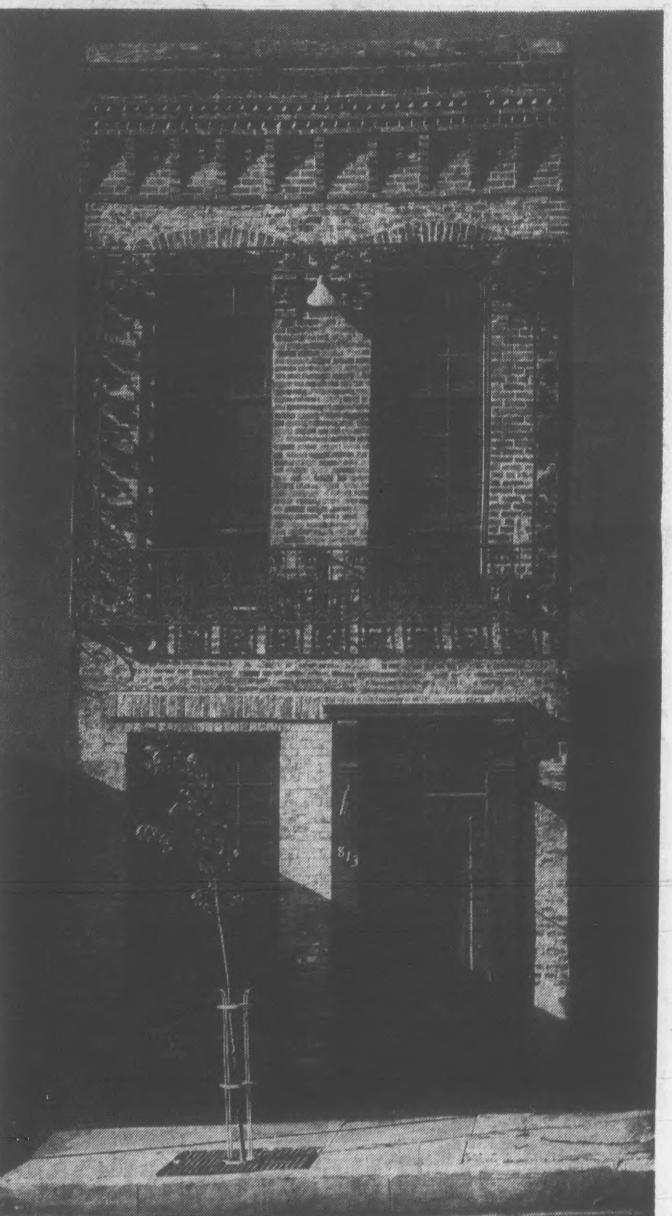
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FAMILIARITY fails to clarify one's impressions of Houston's character. At first one

See THE FACE on Page 3



THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER ATTRACTS THE HEARTSICK FROM ALL THE WORLD TO HOUSTON
Medical Students Intently Observe An Operation at the Baylor University College of Medicine



THIS IS THE OLDEST BUILDING IN HOUSTON — BUILT IN 1848
It is the Old Kennedy Trading Post at 500 Congress Avenue