

A SHORT HISTORY OF BUFFALO BAYOU AND THE  
HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL--1825 TO 1925

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A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Sam Houston State Teachers College  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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by

John M. Weatherall

Huntsville, Texas

August, 1956

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Approved:



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Dean of the College

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### Purpose

The purpose of this study has been to trace the origin and development of the idea of a deep water channel from the City of Houston to the Gulf of Mexico. There was no record of such a study or research in either the Houston Public Library or the Harris County Houston Ship Channel Commission Library.

This is the story of the origin of the commercial development of Buffalo Bayou, Houston, Texas, from about 1820, the earliest mention of the stream in history, to the present day gigantic inland port of Houston. It has been written in the hope that a history of the efforts of one community will throw some light on the history of the country as a whole. The evidence seems to indicate that the history of the Houston Ship Channel is peculiarly the history of all Texas on a small scale, in that all of its major problems had a parallel in the major problems of the young nation. In the way the town of Houston and its citizenry solved these problems may be found illustrations of the efforts of the nation to solve those problems which it faced.

The practical, businesslike beginning of the ship channel, the individual and collective enterprise, the

foresight and energetic use of the means at hand, are significant as an indication of the beginning of the factors which have enabled Houston to take first place among the cities of the state in size and in commercial importance.

### Methods

The only method whereby the history of the commercial development of Buffalo Bayou to the present Houston Ship Channel could be traced was through reference to the first newspapers published at Columbia, Texas, and later in Houston, beginning in 1836. There were many available booklets, pamphlets, and circulars on the subject, but the validity of these media were questionable. Reference material in the first stage of the study covering the years 1820-1850 was found in the early Spanish Deed Records of Harris County, in the Deed Records of Harris County, and in authentic early maps in possession of the Houston Public Library. The account books of several of the early travelers and merchants of the city proved to be valid and were therefore valuable to the study. In the middle period of the research covering the years 1850-1900 valuable source material was available in the form of account books of the time and in histories of eye-witness nature. In the last phase of the study covering the years 1900-1925 material was available in the form of newspaper stories and accounts of events. In none of the periods is there a complete

study from origin to completion of the project. Several of the participants have written stories of their particular connection with the channel, and these studies have been published in the daily Houston papers as source material.

### Findings

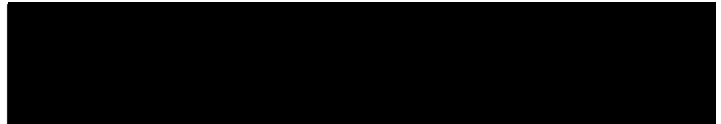
It is apparent from this short history that the one hundred years have been a period of the hope this community held for the constant improvement of its waterways. That the community has worked incessantly towards that end, none doubts. It has neither faltered nor wavered at any time or place on that journey.

The origin and development of the Houston Ship Channel in words and figures must hold a surpassing interest to those who are interested in industrial development and growth. What has already been achieved is largely due to the assistance of the United States Government, coupled with the courage, the confidence, and cooperation of the community. The waterway and the publicly owned rail and water terminal facilities are dedicated to the service of commerce.

Transportation and Commerce authorities agree that no man can foretell the future industrial development along this land locked and safe and secure waterway and that the industrial development and growth will be limited only by the growth of Texas as a whole.

Since there was no organized data concerning the Houston Ship Channel, it is to be hoped that this thesis will be of some interest and benefit to students of history and economic progress. The writer will be content if the material here presented preserves the magnificent spirit and enterprise which has created from a muddy, slithering bayou, one of the most important channel waterways and ports of the world.

Approved:

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the supervising professor.

Supervising Professor

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. L. A. McGee and the Committee, I am deeply grateful for assistance in selecting the subject and for their guidance in the preparation of the thesis. I wish also to acknowledge my appreciation to the staff of the Houston Public Library for their interest and assistance in locating material. To Miss Margaret Woodward for her interest and encouragement and to the many other persons who have contributed in various ways to the completion of the thesis I wish to express my sincere thanks.

John M. Weatherall



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

#### PURPOSE AND METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

##### The Problem

This is the story of the origin of the commercial development of Buffalo Bayou, Houston, Texas, from about 1820, the earliest mention of the stream in history, to the present day gigantic inland port of Houston. It has been written in the hope that a history of the efforts of one community will throw some light on the history of the country as a whole. The evidence seems to indicate that the history of the Houston Ship Channel is peculiarly the history of all Texas on a small scale, in that all of its major problems had a parallel in the major problems of the young nation. In the way the town of Houston and its citizenry solved these problems may be found illustrations of the efforts of the nation to solve those which it faced.

The practical, businesslike beginning of the ship channel, the individual and collective enterprise, the shrewd foresight and energetic use of the means at hand, are significant as an indication of the beginning of the factors which have enabled Houston to take first place among the cities of the state in size and in commercial importance.

### Purpose and Method of Investigation

The purpose of this study has been to trace the origin and development of the idea of a deep water channel from the City of Houston to the Gulf of Mexico. The subject was an unexplored field for research and study. There was no record of such a study or research in either the Houston Public Library or the Harris County Houston Ship Channel Commission Library.

The only method whereby the history of the commercial development of Buffalo Bayou to the present Houston Ship Channel could be traced was through reference to the first newspapers published at Columbia, Texas, and later in Houston beginning in 1836. There were many available booklets, pamphlets, circulars, on the subject, but the validity of these media was questionable. Reference material in the first stage of the study covering the years 1820-1850 was found in the early Spanish Deed Records of Harris County, in the Deed Records of Harris County, and in early maps in possession of the Houston Public Library. The account books of several of the early travelers and merchants of the city proved to be valid and were therefore valuable to the study. For the middle period of the research covering the years 1850-1900 valuable source material was available in the form of account books and in histories of eye-witness nature. For the last phase of the study covering the years 1900-1925 material was

available in the form of newspaper stories and accounts of events. In none of the periods is there a complete study from origin to completion of the project. Several of the participants have written stories of their particular connection with the channel, and these studies have been published in the daily Houston papers as source material.

Since there was no organized information concerning the Houston Ship Channel, it is to be hoped that this thesis will be of some interest and benefit to students of history and economic progress. The writer will be content if the material here presented conveys the magnificent spirit and enterprise which has created from a muddy, slithering bayou, one of the most important channel waterways and ports of the world.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE BAYOU

Buffalo Bayou heads about thirty miles west of Houston, in the extreme northeastern corner of Fort Bend County, and its course is slightly south of east, a distance of some fifty miles to the San Jacinto River and thence into Galveston Bay. Its entire course lies within the limits of Stephen F. Austin's first grant from Mexico. Buffalo Bayou is an arm of the Gulf of Mexico--it is recorded that at the foot of Main Street, in Houston, there is a daily rise and fall of the ocean tide of less than two inches, which increases eastwardly towards its mouth.

At Houston, White Oak Bayou flows into Buffalo Bayou, which is further augmented by numerous other "bayous," among which are Brays', Sims', Vince's, and Green's.

In its primitive state Buffalo Bayou was an unusual stream. Its banks were high; its waters deep; and it was overhung with the branches of large forest trees. In the Spanish Deed Records there is a deed from John D. Taylor, dated April 8, 1828, conveying his league of land to Stephen F. Austin, in which Taylor describes himself as living at "Punto Pino" (Piney Point) on "del Arroyo Cibolo, en Ingles

Buffalo Bayou."<sup>1</sup> This is evidence that the name Buffalo

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<sup>1</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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is derived from the Bison.

In 1836, Juan N. Almonte, an officer in the Mexican Army, made a statistical report on Texas in which he described the various geographical and governmental divisions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Juan N. Almonte, "Statistical Report on Texas," in Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXVIII, 197.

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In this report he stated that the Department of Brazos was what was generally known as Austin's Colony and mentioned Harrisburg as one of its chief cities. Some time between the gathering of facts for this report and October, 1835, the municipality of Harrisburg was created from part of the Department of Brazos. Probably it was organized after the dissolution of the Texas-Coahuila Congress in April of that year and was not recognized officially until the formation of the Texas provisional government. In the Journals of the Consultation, convened at San Felipe, October 16, 1835, are listed the members who presented their certificates of election.<sup>3</sup> The governmental units are here spoken of as

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<sup>3</sup> H. P. N. Gammel (ed.), The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897 (Austin, 1898), I, 508.

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municipalities, and Lorenzo de Zavala, Clement C. Dyer, and William P. Harris are listed as the members representing the Municipality of Harrisburg. This is the first reference that has been found concerning any kind of county organization. An act of Congress of the Republic of Texas, dated December 20, 1836, provided for organizing local county government.<sup>4</sup> Two days later an act provided that the county

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1074.

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seat of Harrisburg County should be Houston and also that Galveston Island should be included within the limits of Harrisburg County.<sup>5</sup> On December 28, 1839, Congress changed

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1208.

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the name of Harrisburg County to that of Harris County.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., II, 222.

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By various subsequent acts of Congress and the state legislatures creating and defining the boundaries of the counties adjoining it, Harris County was reduced to its present size.

The earliest mention of Buffalo Bayou in Texas history is in 1820 when a Colonel Knight and Walter C. White burned off a cane break and raised a crop of corn on a point on the



bayou in what is now Harris County.<sup>7</sup> Below the point of the

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<sup>7</sup> Houston Chamber of Commerce, "The Houston Ship Channel," The Houston Magazine, November, 1952, 16.

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junction of Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto River on the east bank, the town of Lynchburg was founded in 1822 by Nathaniel Lynch.<sup>8</sup> And opposite Lynchburg on the west bank,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16.

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the town of San Jacinto was established, but was later destroyed in the storm of 1875. At about the same date the town of Buffalo was set up, and at the mouth of Green's Bayou the site of Pockersville was plotted in 1823.<sup>9</sup> Both

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 17.

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towns failed to survive.

It is said that the first settler in the county was a surveyor named Nicholas Rightor, who in 1822 lived alone on the extreme end of Morgan's Point.<sup>10</sup> John Iiams, with his

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<sup>10</sup> C. Anson Jones, "Extracts from an Historical Sketch of Harris County," in Burke's Texas Almanac and Immigrant's Handbook, 1879, 74-83.

---

wife and two sons, settled in 1822 near the mouth of Cedar Bayou, where a league of land was granted him, this being afterward the home of Sam Houston. In 1823, Mrs. Jane Wilkins with her two daughters and her son-in-law, Dr. James A. E. Phelps, settled on Buffalo Bayou in what was later known as "Frost Town," within the limits of the present city of Houston.<sup>11</sup> This is claimed to have been the earliest set-

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<sup>11</sup> Spanish Land Grant Records, II, 582 and 446; Jones, "Historical Sketch," in Burke's Texas Almanac, 1879, 77.

---

tlement at the point where the city of Houston now stands.

The townsite of Harrisburg, some seven miles east of Houston, was laid out about 1826. John R. Harris had settled there in that year, and the town was named for him. It was located at the junction of Buffalo and Bray's Bayous<sup>12</sup> which

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<sup>12</sup> Looscan, "Harris County," in Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XVIII, 220.

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was considered the head of navigation, and soon became important as a depot for supplies.

The little town of Harrisburg was destroyed by the Mexican Army shortly before daylight on April 16, 1836. On April 20, 1836, the Mexican Forces also burned a vessel and warehouse at the old town of New Washington on San

Jacinto Bay, and on the evening of April 20, 1836, they established camp at a point less than a mile from Buffalo Bayou.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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Sam Houston's army crossed Buffalo Bayou on April 18, 1836, immediately east of Harrisburg and established its camp on the south bank of the stream in a beautiful grove of live oak trees. The battle of San Jacinto was fought nearby on the afternoon of April 21.

John R. Harris died on August 21, 1829, and his estate was in litigation until 1838. In 1836, the final settlement of the lawsuit which involved the title to the land on which Harrisburg was built seemed so remote and destruction of the little town by the Mexican Army so complete that, in spite of its superior advantages for the location of that city, the founders of Houston decided to begin a new town in its vicinity.

These founders, Augustus Chapman Allen and his brother, John Kirby Allen, came from New York to Texas in 1832. In August, 1836, they bought from Mrs. T. F. L. Parrott, formerly the wife of John Austin, the south half of the lower of the two leagues of land granted to John Austin, near the head of tidewater on Buffalo Bayou. The deed is dated

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August 27, 1836, and was recorded on November 8, 1837. The consideration expressed was five thousand dollars. The deed declared in accord with other deeds of the day, "that the above price is just value, and should it be hereafter worth more, she makes a donation of the excess to the purchasers be it more or less."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Deed Records of Harris County, A, 157-158.

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On August 30, 1836, The Telegraph and Texas Register, then published at Columbia, carried an advertisement of the town of Houston. This masterpiece of boosting serves as evidence that real estate promotion is not a new art.

The town of Houston situated at the head of navigation on the west bank of Buffalo Bayou, is now for the first time brought to the public notice because until now, the proprietors were not ready to offer it to the public, with the advantages of capital and improvements.

The town of Houston is located at a point on the river which must ever command the trade of the largest and richest portion of Texas. By reference to the map it will be seen that the trade of San Jacinto, Spring Creek, New Kentucky and the Brazos above and below Fort Bend must necessarily come to this place and will at this time warrant the employment of at least one million dollars of capital, and when the rich lands of this country shall be settled a trade will flow to it, making it beyond all doubt, the great interior commercial emporium of Texas.

The town of Houston is distant 15 miles from the Brazos River, 30 miles, a little

north of east, from San Felipe, 60 miles from Washington, 40 miles from Lake Creek, 30 miles South West from New Kentucky, and 15 miles by water and 8 or 10 by land above Harrisburg. Tide water runs to this place and the lowest depth of water is about six feet. Vessels from New Orleans or New York can sail without obstacle to this place, and steamboats of the largest class can run down to Galveston Island in about 8 or 10 hours, in all seasons of the year. It is but a few hours sail down the bay, where one may take an excursion of pleasure and enjoy the luxuries of fish, fowl, oysters and sea bathing. Galveston Harbor, being the only one in which vessels drawing a large draft of water can navigate, must necessarily render the island the great naval and commercial depot of the country.

The town of Houston must be the place where arms, ammunitions, and provisions for the government will be stored, because, situated in the very heart of the country it combines security and means of easy distribution and a national armory will no doubt very soon be established at this point.

There is no place in Texas more healthy, having an abundance of excellent spring water, and enjoying the sea breeze in all its freshness. No place in Texas possesses so many advantages for building, having pine, ash, cedar and oak in inexhaustible quantities; also the tall and beautiful magnolia grows in abundance. In the vicinity are fine quarries of stone.

Nature appears to have designated this place for the future seat of government. It is handsome and beautifully elevated, salubrious and well watered, and now in the very heart or center of population, and will be so for a length of time to come. It combines two important advantages: a communication with the coast and foreign countries, and with the different portions of the Republic. As the country shall improve, railroads will become in use, and will be extended from this point to the Brazos and up the same, and also from this up to the headwaters of San Jacinto, embracing that rich

country, and in a few years the whole trade of the upper Brazos will make its way into Galveston Bay through this channel.

Preparations are now making to erect a water Saw Mill, and a large public house for accomodation will soon be opened. Steamboats now run in this river and will in a short time commence running regularly to the Island.

The Proprietors offer the lots for sale on moderate terms to those who desire to improve them, and invite the public to examine for themselves.

Signed: A. C. Allen for  
A. C. & J. K. Allen.

### CHAPTER III

#### HOUSTON, HEAD OF BAYOU NAVIGATION

In January, 1837, the Laura, the first steamboat ever to dock at Houston, brought a small group of settlers to the new town. Among her passengers were Francis R. Lubbock and J. K. Allen, one of the proprietors. Francis R. Lubbock says, in writing of the trip, that after a careful search they "discovered" the town.<sup>1</sup> The boat had no trouble in the

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<sup>1</sup> Francis R. Lubbock, Six Decades in Texas (Austin, 1900), 45.

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bayou until it reached Harrisburg, but it required three days to make the twelve miles from Harrisburg to Houston. There were so many obstructions in the channel the passengers had to get out on the shore and cut down trees for windlasses to heave the logs and snags out of their way. They arrived in Houston on January 22 to find the town composed of a few settlers living in tents, with several small houses in the course of erection. Logs were being hauled in to be used in building a hotel.

After the arrival of the Laura light draft craft and barges thereafter regularly navigated the stream as far as Houston, and regular steamboat service was established in 1837 to and from the town of Galveston, and other points on



Galveston Bay, to the new town of Houston.<sup>2</sup> In April, 1839,

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<sup>2</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, February 12, 1838.

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there were five steamboats plying between Houston and Galveston. In May, 1840, the owners agreed upon a scale of freight and passenger rates between Houston and Galveston:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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Cabin Passage \$5.00; Deck Passage \$2.50;  
Freight 50¢ per barrel. Passenger rates  
include supper, lodging, and breakfast.

The Rolla, the first sailing vessel to come up to Houston, arrived from St. Joseph, Florida, on the twenty-first of the following April (1837).<sup>4</sup> It was four days

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, "Historical Sketch," in Burke's Texas Almanac, 1879, 85.

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ascending the bayou from Harrisburg, as obstructions again had to be cut from the channel, and arrived just in time for many of the passengers to attend the ball celebrating the first anniversary of the battle of San Jacinto.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, May 2, 1837.

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The Yellowstone arrived on April 27, 1837, after having spent a great part of two days "groping" at the rate of "one or two miles per hour" to the very crown of the "head of navigation of Buffalo Bayou" to find the city of Houston.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, May 2, 1837.

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The act of incorporation for Houston was approved by the president on June 5, 1837.<sup>7</sup> Thus Houston came into being

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., August 5, 1837.

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and grew into an incorporated city in one short year. Unlike most towns, it did not develop naturally because of a fortunate location or an answered need. Its site was selected by promoters; it was planned and mapped before a single house was built; its advantages were advertised in the national press before they were proved; in short, its prophecy was written. It would seem that it had to justify the faith of its founders, and through their determined effort, enterprise, and sagacity it did. The seat of government was brought to it because it needed the capital. Vessels did not sail to it because it was the head of navigation, as advertised; vessels came to it because it needed them enough to make them come. City property sold for prices current in well-developed cities in old countries, because the propri-

etors planned to make the property worth the price to the investors. Someone has spoken of Houston as a splendid monument to the success of the real estate promoters' art. From the same viewpoint one can look back to the end of its first year and see that the monument had even then taken rough form. Houston was the "commercial emporium of Texas" in embryo.

The natural situation for Houston, from a commercial point of view, was inferior to that of rival towns, but the temporary presence of the capital furnished an opportunity for business men to establish Houston not only as a political center but also as the focus of commercial activities. At a time when water transportation had no rival, Buffalo Bayou was naturally the hope for progress and for growth, and the efforts to maintain navigation on it form a great part of the commercial history of the town.

As has been mentioned, the first vessel to come up to Houston was the Laura, in the early part of January, 1837, and later, the Rolla, on April 21, 1837, and the Yellowstone, on April 27, six days after the Rolla. On February 21 of the same year, the regular packet steamer Laura was advertised to leave Marion at four o'clock that afternoon for Houston and all intermediate points.<sup>8</sup> This trip marked the

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<sup>8</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, February 21, 1837.

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historical beginning of regular bayou service to Houston.

On June 1, 1837, the steamboat Constitution amazed Francis Moore, the editor of the Telegraph, who probably had scarcely recovered from his own trip up the bayou, by appearing at the landing in Houston. Moore says very pointedly, "We had harbored the impression that Houston was a little above the head of navigation; but this arrival had almost induced us to do what appears most advisable for the Constitution,--that is, to back out."<sup>9</sup> There is a story told that

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<sup>9</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, June 3, 1837.

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this is exactly what the Constitution did. She had to back down the bayou to a big bend above Harrisburg where she could turn around. Hence the name "Constitution Bend" was borne by a bend in the bayou until it was eliminated by a cut-off channel dredged in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel D. Young, True Stories of Old Houston and Houstonians (Galveston, 1913), 133.

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By the fall of 1837, the steamboat Sam Houston was making regular trips to Galveston. The bayou was still full of snags, and on October 28, 1837, the Telegraph reported that the Sam Houston struck a snag a mile or so below the city and sank shortly after reaching the landing. The

Honorable Alee La Branche, Minister from the United States, was on board, and Houstonians were divided between grief at having one of the links that held them to the outside world at the bottom of the bayou and joy over the arrival of the first foreign minister to reach their country. The vessel was repaired and put back into service, and on March 19, 1838, the Telegraph announced that the Friendship and the Sam Houston had arrived that morning from Galveston. A week later this paper reported that there were then four steamboats, the Branch T. Archer, the Sam Houston, the Friendship, and the Laura, constantly plying between Houston and Galveston,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, March 17, 1838.

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and on May 5, 1838, that "there is now a direct communication by steamboat between Houston and Liverpool via Galveston."

By the end of the second year of the City of Houston, water commerce was well established, and a notice in a newspaper of that time that a new vessel had been added to the bayou trade was no uncommon thing. For example, in the Telegraph of August 4, 1838, an advertisement for the schooner Emily appeared, stating that the vessel would take three hundred barrels and eight passengers. On August 11, the "fast running" steamer Correo began to ply three times a week between Galveston and Houston and carried freight and

passengers.<sup>12</sup> The following week the steamer San Jacinto

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<sup>12</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, August 11, 1838.

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advertised as running between Houston and Galveston,<sup>13</sup> and on

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., August 18, 1838.

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January 2, 1839, the Rufus Putnam made its first trip up Buffalo Bayou with a large number of passengers from New Orleans.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., January 2, 1839.

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In the succeeding years, other boats were added, and many of them played an important part in the commercial and economic life of Houston. Notable among these were the Emblem, Trinity, Dayton, Rodney, Brighten, Patrick Henry, Albert Gallatin, Edward Burleson, and Lady Byron.

To provide for these ships a landing place at the foot of Main Street was built the year Houston was founded. In early 1840, when Charles Bigelow was elected mayor of Houston, he and his newly elected officials went down to the foot of Main Street and inspected the docks on Buffalo Bayou. After examining them the city officials of the four-year-old town decided to rebuild the wharves with the purpose of making

them more durable and more accessible to vessels. The plan met with much enthusiasm and the first municipal wharf was built.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Houston Chamber of Commerce, "Houston, For More Than 125 Years a Growing Port," The Houston Magazine, May, 1952, 12.

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The conditions of the bayou were, from the first, a serious problem. Overhanging trees impeded the progress of vessels, and snags sank many a boat and its cargo. Mrs. Houstoun, an English lady who visited Houston in 1843, wrote an interesting description of the bayou after her trip up from Galveston--the description of a stream which might delight an artist but could give only grief to the pilot of a vessel. She says:

For a considerable distance from the mouth the shores are low, flat, and swampy, but as the stream narrowed there were high banks, and the trees were quite beautiful in spite of the season, which was extremely unfavorable to foliage and wood scenery. Such magnolias--eighty feet in height, and with a girth like huge forest trees, what must they be when in full bloom! It seemed one vast shrubbery; the trees and shrubs grew to a prodigious height, and often met over the steamer, as she wound through the short reaches of this most lovely stream.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Houstoun, Texas and the Gulf of Mexico (London, 1844), II, 181.

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## CHAPTER IV

### FROM BAYOU TO PORT BEGINNINGS

When Houston was just two years old its commercial leaders asked for a Chamber of Commerce. The minutes of the Third Congress contain the story of what is claimed to be the first efforts made by any Texas city towards chartering such an organization. On November 26, 1838, Robert Wilson, member of the Senate from Harrisburg County, presented a petition from the citizens of Houston to the Senate "praying for the establishment of a Chamber of Commerce." The petition was read and referred to the Judiciary Committee.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, November 28, 1838.

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committee must have returned a favorable report, since the minutes of the Senate for December 27, 1838, state that "Mr. Everitt made a report upon the bill to establish a chamber of commerce in the city of Houston, which was read a first time."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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In the afternoon session of the next day, December 28, the Senate passed the bill. Four days before its passage in the Senate, Wilson, sponsor of the bill, had broken up a secret



session in the Senate by a stormy outbreak of indignation over a bill before it and thus brought about his expulsion from that body.<sup>3</sup> On Friday, January 11, 1839, the commer-

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<sup>3</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, December 29, 1838.

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cial leaders of Houston lost their last chance of receiving their charter for the Chamber of Commerce from the Third Congress. In the minutes for the afternoon session of that day the report of the House listed acts approved by the Senate, including the act to establish the Houston Chamber of Commerce, and the message from the Senate, "asking the immediate concurrence of the House."<sup>4</sup> Before any action was

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., January 30, 1839.

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taken, the House was interrupted by the sounds of a bugle and a noisy mob pouring into the capitol "bearing upon their shoulders the Honorable Robert Wilson, as returned again to the Senate, from the District of Harrisburg, Liberty and Galveston." A motion was made to adjourn, owing to the interruption.<sup>5</sup> And, the bill for the charter which Wilson

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., January 16, 1839.

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had sponsored was not passed by the Third Congress. On January 28, 1840, the act of incorporation of a Chamber of Commerce in each of the towns of Matagorda and Houston was signed by President Lamar,<sup>6</sup> and it was Francis Moore, then

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<sup>6</sup> Gammel, Laws of Texas, II, 448.

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Senator from Harris County, to whom the credit went for the final accomplishment of the task begun by Robert Wilson two years before.

In this particular period of the history of the Houston Ship Channel and the city of Houston there were innumerable discouragements and disappointments suffered by the supporters of the port. Some of the native doubters had neither confidence, vision, nor faith in the project, and the Galveston sentiment at the time in referring to the Houston waterway called it the "damndest fake out of doors." So as to overcome such sentiment and to hold the further spread of same, the merchants, traders, bankers and other interests of Houston were seeking the charter so as to organize a chamber of commerce. This group was the first to urge the city council and mayor to some clearing and cleaning of the bayou. The Telegraph of March 20, 1839, carried the news that the work of clearing and cleaning the bayou between Houston and Harrisburg had commenced and was being prosecuted with energy and vigor. A month later the Morning Star

gave out the satisfactory information that the work was progressing successfully under the superintendence of Mr. Pilie. Already five miles had been completed, and vessels were coming up from Harrisburg without the danger of being snagged or having "their upper works carried away." But bayou trouble did not end there. In 1840, the Rodney was grounded on Red Fish Bar,<sup>7</sup> and in 1841, the Patrick Henry met the same

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<sup>7</sup> The Morning Star, January 18, 1840.

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fate.<sup>8</sup> In 1840, the Emblem<sup>9</sup> and the Brighten<sup>10</sup> were snagged

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<sup>8</sup> The Morning Star, May 25, 1841.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., February 10, 1840.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., March 21, 1840.

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and sunk.

The citizens of Houston had always realized the importance of the bayou trade, and these catastrophes seemed to stir them to greater efforts in that direction. Two days after the Star had announced the sinking of the Emblem, it urged those citizens interested in the welfare of the city to attend a meeting at the offices of League, Andrews, and Company to take into consideration the "propriety of making

Buffalo Bayou permanently navigable."<sup>11</sup> The Star gives no

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<sup>11</sup> The Morning Star, February 12, 1840.

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report on how well the meeting was attended, but those who were present expressed themselves as being determined to keep the bayou open. It was unanimously resolved that a treasurer be appointed to collect funds from the citizens, the first money collected to be spent in raising the Emblem.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., February 13, 1840.

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On March 27, 1840, a lottery was advertised to raise funds to improve bayou navigation, and on April 4, the Morning Star carried the news that the city council had appropriated one thousand dollars for removing the Emblem and the Brighten from the channel. Both vessels were raised, and on June 15, 1840, the Brighten made her first trip to Galveston after being repaired and christened General Houston.<sup>13</sup> On December 14, 1841, the Star stated that there

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., June 15, 1840.

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were then four steamers running between Houston and Galveston. Four or five vessels at one time seem to have been the usual number taking care of the trade and traffic between the two

towns.

In 1842, Congress came to the relief of Houston by passing an act, approved on January 29, which authorized the city to remove obstructions in Buffalo Bayou above Harrisburg, and gave it the means to do this by allowing it to collect a tax on steamboats and other craft running the bayou. This tax was not to exceed two and a half cents per tonnage upon any vessel,<sup>14</sup> but it seems to have settled the

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<sup>14</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, March 2, 1842.

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bayou problem for a time.

Two years earlier, in 1840, work had begun on a wharf to extend from the upper side of Main Street to the lower side of Fannin Street. An act signed by the president on February 5 of that year, gave the mayor and city council power to construct wharves on the banks of the bayou in the city limits and to make other improvements for better navigation of the bayou. But the council was already a few days ahead of the president. On January 29, an announcement had appeared in the Morning Star that proposals for the building of a good and substantial wharf would be received at the mayor's office until February 24. The plans specified that the wharf be about five hundred feet long, six feet above low water mark, and twelve feet wide on top. The contractor was to be paid from revenues arising from a lease on the

wharf.<sup>15</sup> The next day after this notice appeared, the editor

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<sup>15</sup> The Morning Star, January 29, 1840.

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of the Star said, very prophetically:

Nothing but want of enterprise and attention to their ultimate interests can prevent the citizens of Houston from making this the great inland commercial mart of Texas. Nature has done much to make it such; let the citizens but give some improvement to her works and they need never fear a rival.

By a city ordinance dated June 8, 1841, the port of Houston was established, the office of wharf master created, and the rates of warfage fixed. The port was designated as commencing where the upper line of the corporation crossed Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou, embracing said bayous and their banks, and ending where the lower line of the corporation crossed Buffalo Bayou. The ordinance specified that all steamboats and other vessels carrying ten or more tons should land their cargoes between the upper line of Main Street and the lower line of Fannin Street. All other vessels should land on the south bank of the bayou between the points where Main Street met the bayou and the upper line of the corporation crossing the bayou. Any vessel not complying with this regulation should be fined twenty-five dollars. A steamer of less than one hundred tons' burden must pay five dollars warfage for the first twenty-four

hours and three dollars for every subsequent twenty-four hours. Every boat of from one hundred to one hundred and fifty tons' burden must pay six dollars for the first twenty-four hours and four dollars for each subsequent twenty-four hours. Each boat of one hundred and fifty or more tons must pay ten dollars for the first twenty-four hours and six dollars for each subsequent twenty-four hours.<sup>16</sup> The Star

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<sup>16</sup> The Morning Star, June 10, 1841.

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announced the election of Charles Gerlach as the first wharf master and also stated that Two Hundred Dollars had been voted by the council to complete the wharf.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., June 12, 1841.

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## CHAPTER V

### FIRST STEPS TOWARD A SHIP CHANNEL

In the early shipping reports, cotton led all other exports in quantity and value. The town and the cotton trade grew together. Other exports, such as lumber, hides, live stock, and pecans, became more and more valuable as time went on, but cotton ranked first. In the fall of 1841, the Telegraph reported, "More cotton has been brought to our market this season than in all preceding years put together," but it gave no estimate of the number of bales.<sup>1</sup> On May 12,

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<sup>1</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, December 15, 1841.

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1842, the Morning Star published a report of the shipments from the port of Houston for the period extending from June 1, 1841, to May 5, 1842, which reads as follows:

There have been shipped from the port of Houston . . . 4,260 bales of cotton; 72,816 feet of lumber; 1803 hides; and 480 barrels of sundries--consisting chiefly of deer skins, horns, &c. There are about 300 bales of cotton still on hand at the stores, and as large quantities are arriving daily from the country, the amount that will be shipped this year will probably be increased to at least 5000 bales. The value of cotton, lumber, and hides shipped may be estimated as follows:

Cotton, 4260 bales, at \$35 a bale	\$149,000.00
Lumber, 72,816 feet, at \$25 a 1000	1,820.40
Hides, 1803 at 80 cts. each	<u>1,442.40</u>
Total	\$152,262.80



In January, 1844, N. T. Davis advertised the first compress and warehouse at Houston. At his establishment cotton could be stored at twelve and one-half cents per bale per month, or stored, weighed, marked, and loaded on a boat, for twenty-five cents per bale.<sup>2</sup> The editors of the Telegraph

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<sup>2</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, January 10, 1844.

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and the Morning Star gave to their readers the information that Davis invented his compress,<sup>3</sup> and that it would press

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., March 6, 1844.

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a five-hundred-pound bale into a twenty-two-inch square in about fifteen minutes, with the aid of only two persons.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Morning Star, March 11, 1844.

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On April 2, 1844, the Morning Star made the following report:

We may estimate the whole value of the exports of those articles received in Houston during the last year as follows: Cotton, \$158,000; hides, \$9,000; and of peltries, \$5,000; making the aggregate value of the articles \$167,000. There have been other articles exported from the city to the amount of about \$10,000. The capital employed in the trade of the city for the last year may therefore be estimated at \$177,000. This is less



by about \$40,000 than the amount employed in trade here in 1841; but it is greater than the amount employed in 1843 or 1842 and the profits of our merchants have been greater.

Davis, the owner of the compress, gave a report in 1845 that is interesting and definite, and hence valuable as a study of the growth of the cotton industry in and around Houston. This report says that 126 bales of cotton were received in Houston during the month of September, 1843; 256 bales in September, 1844; and 717 bales in September, 1845. The number of bales shipped from the city from September 1, 1844, to August 31, 1845, was 11,359.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, September 26, 1845.

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After the year 1845, cotton was becoming more and more the dominant export product for Houston. The citizens of the town were becoming more conscious of the place that cotton must assume in the commercial pattern of the economy. Yet, there came about at this time, a period of apathy of the citizenry towards development of the bayou. Houston became confronted with a problem of trade threatening to find other routes to the coast than through this city. As the junction point of many of the early wagon-train and stage transportation companies its position was more or less permanent, but it was not impossible that the new railroads then beginning to center in Houston should extend their

terminals down to Galveston and deep water.

In order to preserve all the advantages of commerce and transportation that were the results of years of enterprise, Houston must gain advantages where carriers by sea could meet the carriers by land. By early 1845, the chamber of commerce of the city began an educational campaign on the navigation of Buffalo Bayou. The nucleus of this educational campaign centered on the point of the "vast savings per annum to be accumulated to the shipper and the consumer if the fifty mile land haul were eliminated."<sup>6</sup> The net result of

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<sup>6</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, February 12, 1845.

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the campaign was a survey made in the year 1846 by Engineer George Stealey. Engineer Stealey made an examination and a thorough survey of the water-way from Bolivar Roads to Harrisburg.<sup>7</sup> This survey had been ordered by and paid for

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<sup>7</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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by General Sidney Sherman, a hero of San Jacinto, who had commanded the right wing of the Texas Army under General Sam Houston. General Sherman had become wealthy from his interests in eastern railroads and in banking.<sup>8</sup> The report

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<sup>8</sup> The Morning Star, August 18, 1846.

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was minute in all details and closed with the recommendation that the head of navigation for steam ocean-going vessels be located at Harrisburg.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, February 18, 1846.

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The result of Engineer Stealey's survey, was that on February 7, 1853, the State of Texas appropriated \$4,000.00 for the improvement of Buffalo Bayou.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Tri-Weekly Telegraph, April 9, 1857.

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On April 7, 1857, D. Bradbury was awarded a contract by the City of Houston in the amount of \$22,725.00, for improving navigation over Clopper's Point.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tri-Weekly Telegraph, April 9, 1857.

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The City Council of Houston on April 18, 1867, appointed a committee composed of six citizens to recommend a plan for the "building of a ship channel" and to draw up a memorial "praying that Houston be made a port of entry."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> City of Houston Council Record, Book B, 264-65.

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The request for making Houston a port of entry was granted

July 14, 1870.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the  
Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE ROLE OF THE DIRECT NAVIGATION COMPANY

Buffalo Bayou had remained very largely in status quo from about 1842 until the year 1866.<sup>1</sup> On October 9, 1866,

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<sup>1</sup> Jesse A. Ziegler, New Series, The Houston Post, April 28, 1926.

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the Houston Direct Navigation Company was incorporated and began its initial operation of deepening the bayou and dredging a canal across what is now known as Morgan's Point.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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The corporation was invested with authority to improve the navigation of Buffalo Bayou, and by the terms of its charter was obligated to "within six months have on the waters of Buffalo Bayou, Galveston Bay and harbor, a sufficient number of steamers and barges to meet the demands of commerce," and that it should "be subject in transportation of freight to the laws applicable to a common carrier."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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The City of Houston backed the Houston Direct Navigation Company and made an initial contribution of \$200,000 toward the capital stock structure of the corporation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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The traffic of the company had grown to such an extent by April 18, 1867, that it was estimated "three-fourths of the freights and products of the interior were borne upon the waters of Buffalo Bayou,"<sup>5</sup> and freight was carried directly

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<sup>5</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1926.

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to and from the Gulf of Mexico on barges, avoiding the charges and losses incident to handling at Galveston. It was estimated that the savings amounted to "a million dollars per annum."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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The Houston Direct Navigation Company had been formed for the improvement and navigation of the bayou, but the company through its efficient operations and state-wide business dealings, had created a campaign of education of the peoples towards the utilization of Buffalo Bayou in Houston.

By 1870, the campaign of education had so far progressed that the question of Buffalo Bayou navigation was no longer a local one, in any sense of the word, but was state-wide.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jesse A. Ziegler, New Series, The Houston Post, April 28, 1926.

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The company from January 1, 1869, to September 30, 1881, transported through Buffalo Bayou a total of 1,985,806 bales of cotton.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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The Navigation Company continued the work of deepening the bayou and the digging of the channel across Morgan's Point. The City of Houston in assistance given the company, had spent about \$230,000 on this work, when the Galveston Wharf Company came to its assistance in a most unexpected way. The assistance was real and of great value, though it was entirely unintentional on the part of the wharf company: the turn down of the request of Commodore Charles Morgan, the president and chief owner of the Morgan Steamship Line, for better rates and better facilities for his organization in Galveston.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TEXAS TRANSPORTATION COMPANY AND THE CLINTON RAILROAD

The Texas Transportation Company was organized and chartered on September 25, 1866. A group of Houstonians prominent at that time were the organizers, and the first president was W. P. Hamblen, with Colonel John T. Brady as secretary.<sup>1</sup> In January, 1867, Colonel Brady contracted with

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<sup>1</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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T. M. Hooper and P. M. Carey for construction of the railroad from Houston to Clinton where terminal facilities for vessels were being constructed.<sup>2</sup> Some later in the spring of that

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<sup>2</sup> Jesse A. Ziegler, New Series, The Houston Post, April 28, 1926.

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same year, Colonel Brady went to New York City and Boston to raise money with which to finish the railroad and to improve the ship channel. He was armed with resolutions of the Board of Directors of the Texas Transportation Company, authorizing him to borrow any amount not to exceed one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, for improving Buffalo Bayou



for shipping purposes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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Colonel Brady met with some success in raising money for the railroad and ship channel project, and as to keep him ever interested and to send him information from home, a letter dated September 2, 1867, from W. P. Hamblen to Colonel Brady in New York was to be used in presenting the merits of the loan. The letter is as follows:

Houston, Sept. 2nd, 1867.

Dear Brady: Your letter of the 23rd ultimo recd. today and I was glad to hear from you. I have written you several letters and have sent you package of Rice's report as printed by the City, copy of map and 50 special reports of the Texas Transportation Company. One I enclose herein.

Griffin (W. H. Griffin, City Engineer) has made a calculation of the cost of the channel 13 feet to Constitution Bend from Rice's (Hugh Rice, a Civil Engineer) figures of depth and distance and after purchase of two dredge boats and sufficient flat boats at a cost of \$125,000 the whole work can be done effectually for \$108,000 to Constitution Bend. His figures are as follows:

Cost of Dredge Boats & Flats	\$125,000
Cost of 27 months @ \$4,000.00	
per month.....	108,000
Cost of wear and tear.....	31,250
	<u>\$264,250</u>
Less sale, or value of dredge boats after work is completed	93,750
	<u>\$170,500</u>

He estimates that Red Fish & Cloppers Bars can be excavated to 8 feet water at a working expense of \$8,000.00.

I say at all times the road (railroad to Clinton) will be finished by Christmas. I intend this week in having a talk with T. W. House (1st) and try to form, or rather organize, the nucleus of a ship channel company under the Transportation Charter. You I hope will approve if I can effect anything. The subscribing by the New Houston City Company (which owned extensive Bayou frontage), or rather by the stockholders of \$100,000.00 or the stock of that company for a like amount of stock in the Transportation Company I believe something of this kind can be affected. After I sound round and find anything can be done, I will send for Wm. B. (Brady). There is nobody here except House (T. W.) and Morris (J. R.) worth a damn and the latter is too narrow minded to do anything. I tell you this city is sorely in need of men. There is no doubt but that she is dwindling into a one horse concern.

Write to me as you progress. I hope you will excuse any remisness on my part as I only write when I have something to say of a business character. You know everyone has left. N. P. (Turner) and E. P. (Hamblen) are both absent. My family has gone and I am certainly on the town. My best regards to Mrs. Brady. I hope you have been pleased since your departure.

Yellow fever not bad but spreading gradually. You talk of reconstruction. We will not see it in five years. The Radicals of the State will split certain on the negro question. Hamilton (Governor A. J.) will return to the State and will carry a majority of negroes with convention. I have been told by Simon Pure Rads (Radicals) that if this is the case they will defeat admission in Congress. It will be the case. Negroes love office and Jack (Governor Hamilton) knows it and he will play on that string.

Yours truly,

W. P. Hamblen

In an effort to interest the "home-folks" in the railroad and ship channel project, the following ad appeared in the Telegraph of October 15, 1867:

Office of Texas Transportation Company  
Houston, Texas  
October 15, 1867

The Transportation Company solicit subscriptions for Five Hundred shares of their Capital Stock, (\$50,000), for the purpose of opening a channel on Red Fish and Clopper's Bars. First installment of ten per cent to be paid on 15th November next. Full particulars given at the office of the company, Pillot Building, upstairs. Installments to be paid to A. J. Burke, at his office, N.E. Corner Franklin and Main Streets.

W. P. Hamblen,  
Pres. Transportation Co.

The "Clinton Railroad" was completed in 1868 but the steamships did not come. The main obstacles were Clopper's Bar, Red Fish Reef, much poverty and a smaller community brought on by the Reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> Commodore Charles Morgan

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<sup>4</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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acquired the company for debt about 1870 and completely rebuilt and refurbished the railroad equipment.

The New Orleans Times on September 21, 1876, had the following to say concerning the Texas Transportation Company Railroad and the Houston Ship Channel:

The Morgan Line shipped yesterday by the New Orleans, St. Louis & Chicago Railroad two passenger and one baggage car for their new railroad running from Houston to Clinton, Texas, eight and one-half miles in length. At Clinton all future freight and passengers will be transferred for all interior points in Texas instead of Galveston as formerly.

Her Wharf Monopoly has thus killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Moral: Other close fisted monopolies should take warning and avoid her errors.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EARLY BAYOU DEVELOPMENT BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

The City Council of Houston appointed on April 18, 1867, an additional group of citizens to assist a committee named on April 4, 1867, which had been appointed to recommend a plan for "building of a ship channel."<sup>1</sup> The following

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<sup>1</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, May 2, 1867.

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excerpt is taken from the Telegraph and Texas Register of May 3, 1867:

During the year, the Common Council of the City of Houston, appointed a committee, composed of Aldermen and citizens, instructed to have a survey and estimate made for a proposed channel of navigation through Buffalo Bayou and Galveston Bay, to Bolivar Channel, near the outer bar in the Gulf of Mexico, to be of capacity in width and depth, sufficient to permit sea-going vessels, with a draft enabling them to pass over the outer Galveston Bar of 13 feet of water at mean tide, to continue onward, without detention, directly to Houston, through such a Ship Channel, by doing which the heavy cost of transportation now incurred by the use of railroads, steamboats, and barges, compelled through trans-shipment at Galveston, for the distance between the two cities, could be greatly reduced, together with the entire avoidance of the incidental ones of lighterage, damages, pilotages, and delays, originating from the obstacles and dangers interposed by what is known as the Inner Galveston Bar, all of which the route of the survey of the proposed ship channel would escape.

In the performance of their duties, the Committee employed the services of Hugh Rice, Esq., a gentleman of distinguished and eminent ability, both in Europe and in our own country, in his profession of Hydrographical Engineering. With his Corps, and at a cost of about nine thousand dollars to the city of Houston, he made a survey complete and perfect in all its parts, and a report accompanied with maps, profiles, and estimates, explanatory of the entire feasibility and practicability of the contemplated work, and of its small comparative cost, with the immense results derivable through its construction.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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It was estimated by Mr. Rice that in the year 1869, freight having a measurement of 1,000,000 barrels, arrived at Galveston, destined for Houston and other interior points. The cost of this amount of freight from Galveston to Harrisburg and Houston at forty cents per barrel amount to \$400,000.00. In addition, it was estimated that the expenses of 25,000 passengers at four dollars each would be \$100,000.00, making a total of \$500,000.00, that might have been saved the producers and consumers if the construction of the Ship Channel should be completed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hugh Rice, Report of Survey of Buffalo Bayou, San Jacinto River and Galveston Bay (Houston, 1867).

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The Hugh Rice Survey and Report made the following claims in behalf of the proposed Ship Channel enterprise:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Galveston News, September 18, 1871.

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That freights can be carried to and from foreign or domestic ports to Houston, at the same rate they are now carried to and from Galveston.

That the advantages to vessels of lying in fresh water, destructive to worms, muscles, and other evils incident to salt water ports, security from storms, lower rates of insurance, cheaper supplies, avoidance of delays, and cost of lighterage, and other contingencies far more than compensate for the small cost of towage of sail vessels from 8 to 10 hours, for the additional distance between the two cities, while with steam vessels no towage would be necessary.

As to what it costs a vessel to discharge and receive her cargo at Galveston, the following extract is taken from a letter of a ship master:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Rice, Report of Survey of Buffalo Bayou, San Jacinto River and Galveston Bay (Houston, 1867).

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Galveston, Feb. 18th, 1870.

. . . My ship is 418 tons register, carries 600 tons dead weight, and 1400 bales of cotton.

Deep Load Draft, 14 feet. Cotton draft,  
12 feet.

As a matter of course I have to lighter 250 tons outside, and about 100 over the inner

bar. At the present rate of lighterage, 25¢ per sack of 200 pounds outside, and 20¢ inside, you see that my lighterage into Galveston is say eight hundred dollars (\$800.00).

When there is steam towage, \$120 in and \$120 out, and pilotage at \$6 per foot.

I have often had to lay from 14 to 20 days before I could get over the sand bar.

My average expense is about \$3 per bale, that is, \$4200; and sometimes more.

There is no doubt that Hugh Rice was absolutely positive of the benefits that would accrue to Houston if the proposed ship channel should be built. His report of the survey was printed by the City of Houston and the Chamber of Commerce and widely circulated throughout the trade area. Excerpts from the report are as follows:

When it is remembered that the amount of \$4200 as an average expense encountered by a vessel at Galveston, is consumed for lighterages, towages, pilotages, upon a vessel, then the rates charged to tow a vessel into Galveston would show that the Houston Ship Channel would be a most profitable business venture for towage of vessels from the outer Galveston Bar to the wharves in Houston, if done so at the same rates.

The great question with the planter and merchant is cheap transportation. A large portion of the value of the products of the soil is thus consumed. Their value in the markets of the world being fixed, and regulated by the demand and supply, every dollar saved in transportation goes direct into the pockets of the producers, all the cost of lightering and freight, together with the incidental delays thereby, reshipment by rail, barges, or steamboats, where the same can be made avoidable by a vessel reaching the "nearest" point of transshipment, add to the cost of merchandise, and



is paid by the consumer. Every dollar of the heavy charges paid by a vessel that could be saved, would enable their owners to carry merchandise and produce cheaper, and the people would receive thereby the benefit.

The construction of the Ship Channel would add a half cent per pound to the home value of every pound of cotton shipped out of Galveston Bay, and increase in proportion, the value of all other products for export, while reducing the cost of articles of consumption.

The system inaugurated by the Houston Direct Navigation Company of receiving freight in the roadstead, or outside the outer bar, has been successful and productive of great benefit to the agricultural interests and trade of the interior. This company now freights vessels in Northern ports and in Europe, receiving its freight outside the bar, by which means vessels are enabled to take freights at low rates, and to enter Galveston without lighterage after the interior freight has been lightered by that company, otherwise freights would be much higher. If the lighterage system is to be maintained, the construction of the nine-foot channel will make available the employment of the largest ships in our carrying trade. That depth would allow the use of iron barges of immense freight capacity and towboats of great power. Two of these barges, carrying from one to two thousand bales of cotton each, can be towed by one tugboat from Houston to the Gulf; an amount of freight exceeding the capacity of five full freight trains. While it is believed, that a class of light-draft iron and wooden steam and sail vessels, will be constructed for our trade, able to carry large cargoes on twelve feet of water, it is well to mention a fact, not known to most of the people of the interior, that the proportion of tonnage engaged in our trade, unable to cross the outer bar, at all, is yearly on the increase. With the Ship Channel completed, so that vessels of from ten to twelve feet water can reach the head of tidewater, without the expense of lighterage, they would be able to carry remunerative cargoes, and thus overthrow the whole lighterage system. At present, the expense is such that they cannot make a profit except at high rates of freight.

It is believed that the construction of the Ship Channel, will induce the building of lines of vessels to navigate its waters, of such carrying capacity as will secure cheap transportation. The substitution of iron for wood in the construction of vessels, has given greater power, carrying capacity, durability, safety and speed, with less draft. The vessels of the Morgan Line draw but seven and a half to nine feet, loaded. Experience has proven them to be the safest vessels afloat; and it is believed that when the energies of the enterprising people of Houston are directed toward the creation of lines of steam and sail vessels, adapted to the navigation of the Ship Channel, in its various stages of improvement, they will find that the ship-builders of the world have already anticipated their wants.

It needs only water to float vessels; and having obtained a Channel of sufficient width and depth, the economy of bringing vessels from foreign and domestic ports, direct to the wharves of Houston, without breakage of bulk, becomes apparent to the Producers and Consumers of the State, as they thereby are relieved of the costs of the present system, consumed in cost of transportation, by steamboat and railroad below Houston, together with lighterage, costly and vexatious delays, and other incidental expenses. This should certainly stimulate the early completion of a work, pronounced by eminent engineers, entirely simple, feasible and practicable, and one required by the wants of our growing commerce.

The New Orleans Times on November 16, 1867, had the following information on its editorial page:

With fifteen to sixteen feet of water on the outer Galveston Bar, obtained through completion of the Ship Channel, the commercial and maritime position of Texas would be fully established, as, owing to the improvements in ship building, this amount of water will serve the purposes of an extended commerce.

In August, 1867, Hugh Rice wrote a letter to the Committee In Charge of Buffalo Bayou Navigation Improvements.

An excerpt follows:

. . . Some may say--these estimates are too low. When this amount is extended, a further sum, of greater or less amount will be asked for, to enable the work to be completed.

In answer to such opinions, I will say, so satisfied am I of the cost of the work and the amount necessary to be expended, that I will superintend the work and ask no further emoluments for my services than ten per cent on the amount I will save from this estimate. You will observe I do not ask ten per cent on cost, but ten per cent on saving. If I save \$100,000 in the cost I get \$10,000, and you get the remaining \$90,000. In other words, for every ten cents I make, you make ninety cents.

Confidence cannot make you a fairer proposition.

In the 47th Congress, First Session, House of Representatives, on December 22, 1881, a bill was introduced titled Improvement and Commerce of Buffalo Bayou, Texas. The bill gave the importance of improving the navigation of Buffalo Bayou, and statistical information concerning the commerce of the city of Houston. It was referred to the Committee on Commerce on February 5, 1882. The Committee report on the bill declared:

With the acquisition of a deep-water channel in the bayou will come an influx of commerce by water which will give Houston an impetus in the trade seldom experienced by interior cities. The entire freedom from lighterage and wharf charges, and the unrivalled facilities of railroad transportation which she possesses, will invite commerce, and a future of great commercial prosperity will as a natural consequence ensue.

A corps of engineers, headed by Captain R. B. Talfor, United States resident engineer in Galveston, Houston's staunchest friend, and a strict advocate of the work, was sent by the government with instructions to inspect the work already done and to report on what appeared to be the possibilities of the stream as an effective and important waterway.<sup>6</sup> The group reported that twelve feet of water, as an

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<sup>6</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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average depth of the channel to the foot of Main Street, could be had.

Houstonians then got busy. One of the conditions of the bill covering the proposed sale of the channel to the government, was that the government should, in the purchase of the channel, refund to Charles Morgan the amount expended by him in the preliminary work and proceed to carry out the remaining terms of the undertaking as originally accepted by Morgan when he took over the channel and its development from the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company.

In due course, the government did work here and there on the channel under various appropriations, the sum total of which was about \$147,000.00<sup>7</sup> When these sums were

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<sup>7</sup> Jesse A. Zeigler, New Series, The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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exhausted, the channel from Clinton to Bolivar varied in depth from fourteen to thirty feet. However, the work amounted to something; progress had been made and an inspection in 1880 showed that the channel through Morgan's Point and Red Fish Bay had actually deepened. This was brought about through a "scouring" process of the flowing water and tidal action.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jesse A. Zeigler, New Series, The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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Houstonians continued to press Congress for further and more liberal action and development of the channel. Many visits were made to Houston and down the bayou by congressional committees and government engineers. In 1891, the money was finally paid to Charles Morgan and, with the booming of cannon, the log chain across the channel at Morgan's Point was removed and a "free Houston waterway thrown open to the world."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BUFFALO BAYOU SHIP CHANNEL COMPANY, REAL DEVELOPER OF A PUBLIC WATERWAY

The real work of making the Houston Ship Channel started on January 23, 1869, when the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company was organized, the purpose of its charter being

to form, construct, own and maintain a ship channel from any point at or within the corporate limits of the City of Houston, through Buffalo Bayou, to deepen, straighten and widen same through the water connecting Buffalo Bayou with Gulf of Mexico at Bolivar Channel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Houston Chronicle, April 12, 1924.

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The authorized capital stock was placed at \$1,000,000.00, with the privilege of increasing it to the amount of \$10,000,000.00.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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On July 28, 1870, the legislature approved the charter as granted by the constitutional convention.<sup>3</sup> The company

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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undertook to "straighten out the bayou to Morgan's Point."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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On May 21, 1873, the legislature granted six sections of land of 640 acres each for each mile of channel improved by the company. In this connection the records of the City Council Book, Volume B, April 4, 1867, show:

On motion of Alderman Howard the following named citizens . . . , were appointed a committee to draw up a memorial to be forwarded to the proper authority, praying that Houston be made a port of entry.

In the records of the City Council Book, Volume B, recorded April 18, 1867, pages 264-5, is recorded the following resolution:

Resolved, that his honor, the Mayor, Alex McGowen, is hereby authorized and requested to appoint with the approval of the council, an additional number of citizens of the City of Houston to act with the committee on ship channel from Houston to Bolivar Channel in the lower Galveston Bay, and that said committee prepare and lay before the council an organization and plan for the building of said ship channel.

The Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company, after completing the cut at Morgan's Point made a proposition to turn over the work to the government. A survey was made in 1871 by order of Congress and completed by Lieutenant H. M. Adams of the United States Engineering Corps. Lieutenant Adams' report gave this information:

The obstructions to navigation between Bolivar Channel and Houston are Red Fish Bar, Clopper's Bar (Morgan's Point) and the want of sufficient depth and width in the bayou for eight miles between Harrisburg and Houston.

The Act of Congress, March 3, 1878, provided that this proposition should be accepted and the formal contract was executed on January 22, 1881, by which it was agreed that when the government had completed its channel to Morgan's Cut, the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company's works were to be transferred to the government. The rivers and harbors act of September 19, 1890, provided for a commission of United States engineers to examine and estimate the value of the company's channel. This commission reported December 4, 1892, and Morgan's Cut and canal were transferred to the United States by the payment of \$92,316.85 to the company.

The heavy log chain which Charles Morgan had swung across the mouth of the canal across Morgan's Point, and thus made all vessels pay a toll, had to be taken away. The act of September, 1890, declared:

The ship channel through Galveston Bay from Bolivar Channel to the point where the San Jacinto River enters what is known as the Morgan Channel, is now the property of the United States and is declared to be free to navigation.

The control of this water-way, vested by the Texas legislature in the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company, was



terminated and a public water-way was established.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Houston Chronicle, April 12, 1924.

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The Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company had by 1877 completed its improvements from Morgan's Point up the river and bayou as far as the mouth of Sims Bayou or Clinton, connecting its ship terminals at that point with the "Clinton Railroad" to Houston.<sup>6</sup> By June, 1890, the ship channel to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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the mouth of the San Jacinto River was opened to navigation at a depth of from ten to twelve feet, while the water over the Galveston bar was a little more than thirteen feet, so that the possibilities of navigation were still restricted to light-draft vessels.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., April 12, 1926.

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By June, 1890, over \$140,000.00 out of an estimated cost of \$385,299.75, had been expended on the work. A seven-foot channel had been secured and maintained and many of the

bonds had been eased.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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The net result of these improvements by the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company was the maintenance of a channel ten feet deep and one hundred feet wide from Houston to the Gulf of Mexico. In September, 1895, progressive operations were suspended.<sup>9</sup> By 1896, the jetty construction at the

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<sup>9</sup> The Houston Chronicle, April 12, 1926.

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mouth of Galveston Bay had been successfully completed so that a depth of twenty-five feet was secured over the outer bar, permitting the average deep-draft vessels to enter the harbor and obviate the extensive literage that had up to that time been such a burden on coastwise commerce of Texas.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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## CHAPTER X

### CHARLES MORGAN, FATHER OF THE HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL

Charles Morgan, Commodore and founder of the Morgan Steamship Lines, might appropriately be termed the "father of the Houston Ship Channel."<sup>1</sup> Morgan was a commercial

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<sup>1</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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pioneer and Texas' best friend in its early industrial development, by reason of his untiring efforts to provide Texas with its first regular line of steamships.<sup>2</sup> As early

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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as 1835, while Texas was still a part of Mexico, Morgan sent one of his ships, the Columbia, to Galveston.<sup>3</sup> Morgan also

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<sup>3</sup> S. D. Young, True Stories of Old Houston and Galveston (Galveston, 1913), 16.

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owned a controlling interest in the New York and the Neptune, which operated between New Orleans and Galveston in the years 1841-1845.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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In 1847, Morgan obtained control of the carrying trade between Texas and New Orleans by purchase of the steamships, Palmetto, and the Galveston.<sup>5</sup> Morgan developed a tremendous

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<sup>5</sup> Telegraph and Texas Register, March 8, 1847.

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volume of business, moving in and out of Texas, for the line he now controlled. In 1849, Captain Jerry Smith of the Palmetto took from Matagorda Bay the first cargo of cattle ever shipped from Texas.<sup>6</sup> With control of the ocean-carrying

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<sup>6</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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trade, Morgan now maintained a large fleet for that purpose, and consequently, became the leading patron of the wharves at Galveston.<sup>7</sup> With the large fleet, Morgan became more or

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<sup>7</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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less disgruntled with the facilities and rates accorded him at Galveston.

In an initial conference with the Galveston port officials, Morgan asked for broader facilities and cheaper wharf rates than were then effective. The City of Galveston at that time owned about a one-fourth interest in the

Galveston wharves.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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After several conferences between Morgan and the Galveston Wharf Company interests, the City of Galveston, exerting a dominating influence through its ownership of a portion of the wharf stock, turned a deaf ear to Morgan's entreaties.<sup>9</sup> Morgan became indignant and threatened to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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cross Galveston Bay with his ships and make use of Houston as a terminal port, unless Galveston treated him more reasonably. Galveston, in effect, hooted at the idea, and told Morgan to go ahead--do what he pleased, notwithstanding that at the time he was their most lucrative customer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> S. D. Young, True Stories of Old Houston and Galveston (Galveston, 1913), 18.

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With his ultimatum turned down, Morgan turned immediately to Galveston Bay and Houston's Buffalo Bayou.<sup>11</sup> He

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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first purchased the interest of the City of Houston in the Houston Direct Navigation Company, and immediately put to work a large engineering force to deepen the channel across the bay and to dredge a cut through the present Morgan's Point.<sup>12</sup> The great storm of 1875 destroyed a portion of the

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<sup>12</sup> The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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cut, together with a small fleet of vessels and a number of workmen. Within thirty days the work was resumed until the cut-off through Morgan's Point was completed.

Morgan then claimed the cut as his own, and placing a long, heavy log type chain across the canal, demanded toll payment for all ships passing through. This tariff was regularly enforced and the toll collected until 1891.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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By such action, Charles Morgan had clearly demonstrated what could be done with Buffalo Bayou as an ocean going ship channel, provided proper efforts were made. Immediately, there arose a popular demand from citizens of Houston and from interior merchants who were dissatisfied with the Galveston Wharf Company and its high charges. Congress was

accordingly petitioned and the two senators from Texas, together with the congressmen concerned, were urged that the government take charge of the development of this important water-way, in the bright future of which the supporting population again firmly believed.

On September 22, 1876, the first ocean steamship, the Clinton of the Morgan Steamship Line, navigated Buffalo Bayou, now the Houston Ship Channel, and docked at the new terminal facilities now completed by Charles Morgan and having been given the name of Clinton. The following account of this important event is taken from the Houston Daily Telegraph of September 23, 1876:

Sixty carloads of freight! An ocean steamer comes through the Ship Channel loaded down with freight!

Galveston's cuttle fish--Its Wharf Company flanked and checkmated!

The Steamship "Clinton," Captain Talbot, from Morgan City, Louisiana, with sixty carloads of New York freight for Houston and various points on the Central, International and San Antonio Railroads, arrived at Clinton yesterday morning. The freight discharged yesterday, and loaded in cars for the points of destination.

This vessel brought the Texas freight of the New York steamer "Algiers"--although business via the Ship Channel has not been announced as regularly opened the facilities at command at Clinton have enabled this large amount of freight to be handled rapidly. In a few days we learn that both freight and passenger business will be commenced.

The "Clinton" brought the trucks for the passenger cars now enroute to Houston via Little Rock. Sixteen carloads of cotton from points on the Central Road went down to Clinton yesterday morning. The Houston Depot is not yet completed, but we learn that New York freight will be delivered there this morning. This is a practical result beyond quibble and doubt of the success of the Ship Channel, and proves its reality to the understanding of all. The merchants who receive this freight get it free of the extortions of Galveston bete noir, its hideous Wharf Monopoly. Mr. John H. Reagan's especial pet!



## CHAPTER XI

### GALVESTON'S CONTRIBUTION TO HOUSTON'S SUCCESS AS A PORT

The first great assistance Houston had in bringing the question of Bayou improvement before the public came from the port of Galveston, its bitterest commercial rival. Four or five years after the close of the Civil War, when railroads had been reorganized and the commerce of the state had grown to large proportions, the Houston people began agitating the question of securing better navigation of Buffalo Bayou so as to add to Houston's facilities for handling its rapidly increasing trade. At first, Houston stood alone in making its fight. The people of the interior were indifferent, while those of Galveston ridiculed the idea of Houston ever securing the navigation of its crooked bayou for ocean-going vessels. Unfortunately for Galveston, the Galveston Wharf Company had an absolute monopoly of the whole city water front, and that company was short-sighted enough to take full advantage of the monopoly. It made its rates extremely high and acted very arbitrarily. Jesse A. Zeigler, writing in the Houston Post in 1936 said:

It cost \$5 per bale to take cotton from Houston to Galveston by rail and then the Wharf Company took a whack at it and there was a big hole knocked in the farmer's or shipper's profit by the time cotton got on shipboard after leaving Houston.

Houston was not slow about seizing this strong argument placed in her hands by the Wharf Company and began a campaign of education to teach the people of the interior that "they were far more interested in securing deep water at Houston than was Houston itself."<sup>1</sup> The interior people

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<sup>1</sup> Jesse A. Zeigler, New Series, The Houston Post.

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were shown that if vessels could come to Houston to discharge their cargoes and take on new ones, the fifty mile haul to and from Galveston, and the excessive charges of the Galveston Wharf Company would be things of the past, and millions of dollars would be saved by the interior people annually.

In 1896, when Galveston became a "deep water" port by the completion of the Eads project to bring adequate deep water to its natural harbor at a cost of \$25,000,000.00, some of Houston's most far-seeing citizens visioned the like possibility of bringing "deep water" across the bay and through Buffalo Bayou to Houston. Quietly they perfected an organization to effectuate such purposes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Ball, "The Port of Houston," The Houston Chronicle, August 9, 1936.

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In the 54th Congress, Congressman J. C. Hutcheson, First District, Texas, without publicity, had passed in the

House a provision for a survey of Buffalo Bayou, with a view of obtaining a channel twenty-five feet deep, the depth of the Galveston channel. The House bill was made effective by approval of the Senate.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Ball, "The Port of Houston," The Houston Chronicle, August 9, 1936.

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The survey being authorized, a board of eminent army engineers consisting of Colonel Henry M. Roberts, afterward chief of engineers; Major Derby, in charge of New Orleans and the Mississippi River projects, and Major A. M. Miller, district engineer at Galveston, were appointed to make the survey.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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At the time of the survey, "King Cotton" was on the throne. The Houston Cotton Exchange was the "power house" of the city. Through the Cotton Exchange statistics were gathered to support the project. The board of engineers made a highly favorable report for a twenty-five foot project from Galveston Bay to the foot of Main Street. The report

was filed on December 1, 1897.<sup>5</sup> The board report estimated

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas H. Ball, "The Port of Houston," The Houston Chronicle, August 9, 1936.

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the cost of the project at \$4,000,000.00.

When Congress convened in December, 1898, the Rivers and Harbors Committee was called by Chairman Burton (Congressman Theodore Burton of Ohio) to present to him all requests for appropriations for their states. Congressman Thomas H. Ball, representing the First District, Texas, said:

I found it impossible to prevail upon him to adopt the report of the government engineers looking to the construction of the channel at a cost of \$4,000,000.00, and to get a toe-hold, consented to accept an initial appropriation of only \$300,000 to be expended on the channel from Morgans Cut to Galveston, being known as section number one.

In the spring of 1901, the members of the Rivers and Harbors Committee of Congress engaged in a coast-to-coast junket financed jointly by the numerous communities hopeful of receiving their favors. The committee stopped in Houston and was taken for a boat ride down Buffalo Bayou to Galveston. Later in that year President William McKinley stopped in Houston to make a speech. With their twenty-five-foot channel project still pending, the Houstonians outdid themselves to lavish a hospitality of almost Oriental munificence

on the visitors from Washington.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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Colonel Thomas H. Ball in his History of the Ship Channel gives the following explanation of these tactics:

The combination of this unstinting conviviality in Houston and the gadfly tactics employed in Washington by the endless delegations from Houston finally bore fruit. In December, 1902, the rivers and harbors committee approved an appropriation of \$1,000,000 for the Houston Ship Channel, and in January, 1903, the appropriation sailed through Congress.

Money in hand, Lieutenant-Colonel C. S. Richie, United States district engineer in charge, started his dredges to work.

The various appropriations for the twenty-five foot project up to March, 1909, totaled over \$2,000,000.00. The following is a table of the various amounts appropriated by Congress for the work:<sup>7</sup>

March 3, 1903.....	\$1,000,000
April 28, 1904.....	200,000
March 3, 1905.....	200,000
June 30, 1906.....	200,000
March 2, 1907.....	200,000
May 27, 1908.....	145,000
March 3, 1909.....	100,000
March 4, 1909.....	55,000

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<sup>7</sup> Jesse A. Zeigler, New Series, The Houston Post, April 28, 1936.

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Colonel Thomas H. Ball in his History of the Ship Channel has projected the feeling in Houston at this particular time. He says:

Congress again appropriated the amount necessary to complete the project, and again another hurdle was surmounted and another fight won by Houstonians for an adequate water-way to accomodate deep draft vessels ready and willing to come more than fifty miles inland to care for the great commerce desiring to use Port Houston.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DREAM REALIZED

From 1901 to 1912, progress was almost imperceptible on the Houston Ship Channel; in the latter year work was started on a channel of twenty-five-foot depth. From that time on, changes came with kaleidoscopic rapidity.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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channel began growing deeper and wider and straighter and busier. The long, bare stretches of bank came alive with industrial plants and their slips and wharves and the terminal facilities provided by the city; first small and scattered, then growing larger, with the vacant spaces in between disappearing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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In 1901 the Houston Ship Channel was mostly on paper, lying on a table in the room of the Rivers and Harbors Committee of the House of Representatives at Washington. The paper had been there for some time, usually under a heap of other papers.<sup>3</sup> When it first had been introduced into the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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committee room many years before, the paper had borne the approval of the United States district engineer at Galveston for a project to provide a ship channel twenty-five feet deep from Bolivar Roads to the foot of Main Street, at an estimated cost of \$4,000,000.00.

The twenty-five-foot project from the "foot of Main Street in Houston" to Bolivar Roads in Galveston was authorized by Congress, March 3, 1899, and amended February 3, 1900. Under the amended project a channel 18½ feet deep with cuts through Irish, Clinton and Harrisburg Bends, was dredged from Bolivar Roads in Galveston Bay to Harrisburg.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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On March 3, 1905, Congress further modified the twenty-five-foot project by relocating the terminus of the channel from the foot of Main Street to the head at "Long Reach" which is the present Turning Basin. The channel was deeper than was necessary for barges, but not quite deep enough for the ocean-going vessels Houston sought to bring to her port.

Appropriations were thereafter made by Congress in dribblets for the twenty-five-foot project.<sup>5</sup> One section of

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<sup>5</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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the project was hardly completed before being found to have silted up. Due to the shortage of funds for dredging, Houstonians kept the trail to Washington well beaten by their delegations seeking further funds, but no more funds for channel improvements were forthcoming and barely enough to half maintain the shallow channel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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In early 1909, Mayor Baldwin Rice of the City of Houston, called together the "deep water committee" to make an astonishing proposal.<sup>7</sup> What Mayor Rice said in effect to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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the group was:

We're not getting to first base with Uncle Sam. But Houston has simply got to have a deep water port. I suggest that we make the federal government an offer to pay half the costs of completing our 25-foot project. Such a thing has never been done before, but it won't be the first time we Houston folks have set a precedent.

Mayor Rice's proposal met with a ready acceptance. A study of ways and means to accomplish that end was started. It was decided that the most workable plan was to form a "navigation district" composed of Harris County and let the district issue bonds. In order to do that, it was necessary

to have an enabling act passed by the state legislature and then to get the approval of the citizens in a county-wide election.

So absolutely certain were the Houstonians of legislative and citizenship approval of the plan that, without waiting, another delegation was sent to Washington to make their revolutionary proposition to the Rivers and Harbors Committee.

Congressman Thomas H. Ball reported in his History of Port Houston:

The honorable committeemen were bowled over at this precedent-shattering offer of a community to match dollars with the federal treasury in order to get their project through.

The members expressed their amazement, asked many questions and were given assurance that no railroads or private industries would be permitted to monopolize our waterfront, although given welcome access thereto.

The rivers and harbors committeemen accepted the offer of the Houstonians and voted unanimously to recommend an appropriation of \$2,500,000.00, half to be contributed locally. The appropriation was passed by Congress June 25, 1910.

The "deep water committee" jubilantly hurried home to set in motion the machinery that would make it possible for them to match dollar for dollar with the government.

On January 10, 1910, the voters of Harris County approved the plan and created the Harris County Navigation .

District.<sup>8</sup> On June 1, 1911, by a vote of 16 to 1, the same

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<sup>8</sup> The Houston Chronicle, June 11, 1910.

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voters approved the issuance of \$1,250,000.00 worth of bonds.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., June 2, 1911.

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On June 10, 1912, the long dreamed of contract for the twenty-five-foot waterway from the Turning Basin to the Gulf of Mexico was let and work was started, the project financed jointly by the federal government and the citizens of Houston and Harris County.<sup>10</sup> It is appropriate to note

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., February 22, 1938.

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here that the proposition of matching dollars for dollars in the Houston Ship Channel construction project, was the commencement of a National Policy, and since that time no new important project has been anywhere adopted without assurance of local cooperation and provision, approved by United States Engineers, insuring against private monopolization of harbors and waterways constructed under the direction of the National Government.

Determined that there should be no private monopoly

of waterfront property in Houston's port, Mayor Rice brought condemnation proceedings against several syndicates and individuals, and the city took title to their lands with payment of fair and equitable prices.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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In 1913, Mayor Rice and the citizenry decided that a port without terminal facilities was no port at all, so the City of Houston called on its voters for authority to issue \$3,000,000.00 in bonds to build its own docks.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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With the city rapidly acquiring a large investment in the port, a governing body was created to administer the investment. The first Harbor Board was appointed by Mayor Campbell on December 12, 1913, and held its first meeting on December 19, 1913.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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The twenty-five-foot channel was completed to the Turning Basin on September 7, 1914, at a cost of \$2,412,595.66, precisely one-half of which, \$1,206,297.83, was paid by the

Harris County Navigation District, which in addition contributed \$200,000.00 towards the construction cost of two pipe line dredges for maintenance work.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. M. Farrar, The Story of Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel (Houston, 1926).

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The distance, by thread of the waterway, from the Turning Basin to Bolivar Roads--the channel into the Gulf of Mexico--is fifty miles, and the distance from the Turning Basin to the San Jacinto River is sixteen miles, all of which is a land locked harbor, safe and secure from storms and floods. The dreams and hopes of almost three generations had now come true: a ship channel from Houston to the Gulf of Mexico.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MAINTENANCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SHIP CHANNEL

Transportation by water had been a major activity on the Texas coast since the time of the first colonial settlements, but the development of harbors and waterways by navigation districts as state agencies was a comparatively new method of the control of such projects. On August 3, 1904, the Constitution of Texas was amended so as to provide that upon a vote of two-thirds of the resident property taxpayers in any county or political subdivision thereof, bonds might be issued and taxes levied to provide the interest and sinking funds for the redemption of such bonds to be used in improving rivers and other streams to permit the navigation thereof and to construct and maintain canals and waterways for the purpose of navigation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Article III, Section 52, Constitution of Texas, as amended August 3, 1904.

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Pursuant to that authority the Legislature of Texas, in 1909, passed an act authorizing the formation of navigation districts and provided in the act for the procedure to



be followed in their creation.<sup>2</sup> This act became the first

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<sup>2</sup> Acts of the Thirty-Third Legislature, Chapter 15, 1909.

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navigation district law in Texas.

In the development of such navigation districts, the matter of maintenance and operation came to the front since the first bill had provided only for bonds, together with taxes, to pay the interest and sinking fund on the bonds.

In 1917, the King Bill was passed by the Legislature, which authorized navigation districts to levy a tax for maintenance and operation not to exceed ten cents on the one hundred dollars valuation on all property within the district.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Act of February 23, 1917, to amend Articles 5982 and 5988 of Title 96, Revised Civil Statutes of 1911.

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In 1917, the Legislature submitted to the people an amendment to the Constitution of Texas, which contemplated the conservation and development of the natural resources of the state in a much broader manner than theretofore possible. The amendment passed by vote of the people on August 21, 1917, and is Article XVI, Section 9. It provided that districts created for a variety of purposes such as irrigation, reclamation, drainage, and navigation should be governmental agencies and bodies politic. The amendment did not require

a two-thirds vote of the taxpayers for issuance of improvement bonds and hence a majority vote only was required.

The Harris County Navigation District was created under the statutory authority of the Navigation District Act of 1909, with a three member board of commissioners.

In early 1921 it became obvious that it would be to the advantage of the community to consolidate the City Harbor Board which had been appointed on December 12, 1913, and the Harris County Navigation District. The bill for this consolidation was put before the Legislature on August 21, 1921, and is known as the Act of 1921. This Act of 1921 is the basic law for the creation and operation of the Harris County Houston Ship Channel Navigation District. This bill, general in form, applied only to the Houston district by reasons of the provisions limiting its operation to navigation districts having a population over one hundred thousand persons.

The Act of 1921 provided a different method of appointing the commissioners. The County Commissioner's Court was authorized to appoint two commissioners; the City Council appointed two commissioners; and the chairman was to be appointed by a joint meeting of the City Council and County Commissioners, making a governing board of five members, each to serve a term of two years. Authority was granted such navigation districts to acquire, construct,

maintain, and operate wharves, warehouses, grain elevators, belt railroads, bunkering facilities, and other installations incident to or necessary to the operation or development of the port and waterways within the district.

In May, 1922, the City Harbor Board was absorbed by the Navigation District Board, thus the Harris County Houston Ship Channel Navigation District was created, the Port Commission.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PARALLEL GROWTH OF PORT HOUSTON AND THE SOUTHERN STEAMSHIP LINES

Upon completion of the twenty-five-foot channel in 1914, the next step in the development of the port was to attract shipping lines here, especially coastwise lines for the effect their service would have on railroad freight rates to and from the Eastern industrial centers.

The Southern Steamship Company, with headquarters in New York, had displayed considerable interest in the new Gulf port of Houston. Throughout a lengthy period of negotiations with Houston interests the company had neglected actually to assure ship service. To cinch matters the Houstonians offered the Southern Steamship Company a bond signed by H. C. Schuhmacher, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and one hundred leading citizens, guaranteeing one thousand dollars each to be paid the line for any losses sustained in giving Houston a coastwise steamship service.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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The company promised the service and assured the Houstonians that no bond would be necessary.

In reaching its decision to establish service to

Houston the Southern Steamship Company felt that it could render to the shippers of the vast southwestern territory of the United States served by the Port of Houston, a service not to be excelled at any other port. At the same time they realized that Houston had an unusually bright future as a port and was destined to become, within the course of time, one of the leading gateways of the entire United States, if not of the world.

Upon termination of World War I, and the subsequent release by the United States Shipping Board of control over coastwise shipping, officials of the line decided to confine their operations solely between Philadelphia and Houston. Again they exhibited their unbounded faith in the future of the new Gulf port. Believing, and correctly, that there was ample tonnage to be secured from the great southwestern area, tributary to Houston, to make the northbound voyage from Houston to Philadelphia profitable, service was placed on a semi-monthly basis between the two cities.

In 1920, when strikes and embargoes at both New York and Galveston had thrown the shipping world into a turmoil, the decision proved to have been a sound one.<sup>2</sup> Almost

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<sup>2</sup> The Houston Chronicle, February 22, 1938.

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instantly, Port Houston and the Southern Steamship Company

began to profit. The efficient, economical handling of freight by both the Port of Houston and the Port of Philadelphia, and the efficient handling of ships by the company, dispelled the belief that there were no other ports on the Atlantic seaboard other than New York or on the Texas Gulf other than Galveston. Business for Port Houston increased. Business for the steamship company, gained during the labor troubles, was retained after settlement of the difficulties.

Many people would be surprised to know it, but Port Houston never opened--officially, that is.<sup>3</sup> The day it was

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<sup>3</sup> The Houston Chronicle, August 15, 1948.

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to have made its official debut as a world port, the entire upper Gulf Coast area wallowed in the wake of one of the worst tropical hurricanes of history. That hurricane was the storm of August 16, 1915, which took about two hundred lives and left an estimated \$15,000,000.00 damage in Galveston, Houston, and intermediate points.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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The meandering, sluggish, shallow Buffalo Bayou had been straightened out in its worse bends, and the depth had been dredged to twenty-five feet. Arrangements had been made

to inaugurate ocean steamship service with the Ss Satilla, which was to arrive from New York on August 19. Plans had been completed for the entire city to close down for the biggest celebration it had ever had. The festivities were to start downtown and extend to the San Jacinto Battleground. A watermelon feast with ten-pound slices to each person was slated for the afternoon, and a dance was to wind up the day.

The Chronicle of August 13, 1915, reported:

The tug which is to meet the Satilla is to be specially decorated with flags and bunting in honor of the arrival, and in celebration of Houston's transformation into a deep-water port.

The people need to have their vision enlarged, to be aroused to a consciousness of the fact that what has so far been done is but the work of preparation, that the future of Port Houston is pregnant with the possibilities of commercial development beyond their wildest dreams. They must prepare and pull together toward her predestined commercial supremacy in all the great trans-Mississippi territory.

The same issue of the paper told of a hurricane in the Gulf, but added that "there was no danger until Monday night." The hurricane hit with terrific force Monday night, August 16, 1915. By Thursday, August 19, the day the huge celebration was to have taken place, the Chronicle reported that no news had been received from the Ss Satilla.

The Ss Satilla put into the Turning Basin at 1:00 P.M., Sunday, August 22, 1915. She reached the port without fanfare, as the Chronicle declared in its issue of Monday, August 23, "in the wake of the wildest storm that ever swept



the Gulf of Mexico."

President Woodrow Wilson interrupted a quiet November day cabinet meeting. He pressed a button and on a bank overlooking the Houston Ship Channel, a mortar ripped the noonday silence. Its report sounded the opening of the Port of Houston.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Houston Chronicle, August 15, 1948.

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When the cannon fired on November 10, 1914, a young lady stepped forward and tossed a bouquet of white roses in the Turning Basin. She was Miss Sue Campbell, daughter of Mayor Ben Campbell of Houston. Miss Campbell said:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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"I christen thee Port Houston. Hither shall come ships of all nations and find a hearty welcome."

After this event other steamship lines began joining the Southern Steamship Company in serving Port Houston. It looked as if all would be smooth sailing from then on out. But Galveston secured the congressional authorization for a thirty-foot channel, which would, of course, give it a five-foot advantage over Houston. Houstonians immediately began bedeviling Congress for a thirty-foot channel for the Houston

Ship Channel.<sup>7</sup> Their efforts materialized on March 2, 1919,

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas H. Ball, "The Port of Houston," The Houston Chronicle, August 9, 1936.

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when the added depth was authorized the Houston Ship Channel by the Congress.<sup>8</sup> Work on the thirty-foot channel got under

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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way in May, 1920. With additional appropriations, the project was completed in September, 1925.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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All the trials and tribulations of Houston in its never-ending endeavor to provide, for the shippers of the great southwestern territory of the United States, a seaport capable of efficient and economical handling of commerce tendered it, would seemingly end here. But the growth of Houston as a port from 1925 onward will be one of the most amazing chapters in the annals of Texas History.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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During the year 1925, the port achieved another distinction, and one which is more sought among the ports of the southland than any other, and that is: First Cotton Port of the World.

## CHAPTER XV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The origin and development of the Houston Ship Channel in words and figures must hold a surpassing interest to those who are interested in industrial development and growth. What has already been achieved is largely due to the assistance of the United States Government, coupled with the courage, the confidence, and cooperation of the community. The waterway and the publicly owned rail and water terminal facilities are dedicated to the service of commerce, without which there would be no United States of America.

Transportation and commerce authorities agree that no man can foretell the future industrial development along this land locked and safe and secure waterway and that the industrial development and growth will be limited only by the growth of Texas as a whole.

It is apparent from this short history that the one hundred years have been a period of the hope this community held for the constant improvement of its waterways. That the community has worked incessantly towards that end, none doubts. It has neither faltered nor wavered at any time or place on that journey.

The writer deems it a necessity to summarize this story with a quotation from The Texas Telegraph, published

at Columbia and featured on April 17, 1857:

The History of San Felipe, Velasco, San Luis and Columbia (all on the Brazos River) shows that situation is no guarantee of future greatness. They were all well situated--their owners lacked enterprise. Compare Columbia to Houston! The one situated at the head of tide water on the largest river in the state, the center of the richest planting section of the world--Houston on a shallow bayou, naturally incapable of navigation to any extent, surrounded by post oak, pine barrens and boggy prairies--one has all the advantages of situation, the other of an energetic people.

It is of value to the reader to know just how the Port of Houston is operating under the State of Texas. The Port consists of a governmental agency, the Navigation District set up by the State Legislature, and four private terminals which operate closely with the Navigation District.

The Harris County Houston Ship Channel Navigation District was created by the State Legislature, under provisions of the Texas Constitution and other acts providing for the development of ports in municipalities with a population of over 100,000. Authority is granted such navigation districts to acquire, construct, maintain, and operate wharves, warehouses, grain elevators, belt railroads, bunkering facilities, and other installations incident to or necessary to the operation or the development of the port and waterways within the district. With the approval of the qualified voters within the district, bonds for the purpose of purchasing property, constructing facilities, or

improving and developing the port may be issued. Fullest powers consistent with the Constitution of Texas are granted for the regulation of wharfage and other charges and for operating the port facilities.

The Navigation District is managed, governed, and controlled by a Board of five Navigation Commissioners. Two of the Commissioners are selected by the Council of the City of Houston; two are selected by the Commissioners' Court of Harris County; and the Chairman is appointed by the City Council and County Commissioners' Court meeting in a joint session. The Navigation Commissioners serve for a period of two years, their terms expiring on alternate years. Known generally as the Port Commission, they have jurisdiction and control over the use of the Houston Ship Channel from its beginning in Galveston Bay to the Turning Basin at Houston fifty miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico, and of all streams tributary to the Channel in Harris County. For any construction to be undertaken on the Channel, a permit must be procured from the Navigation District, as well as from the United States Army Corps of Engineers, who are charged with the improvement and maintenance of the Channel. The Navigation Commissioners are empowered to exercise the right of eminent domain in connection with the acquisition of property for the development and operation of the port.

The General Manager of the Navigation District is

appointed by the Port Commission to supervise all of the work and activities of the District. He also serves as Director of the Port and Secretary of the Port Terminal Railroad Association.

The Port Commission has adopted a broad policy of cooperation with the privately owned terminals for the promotion of commerce through the port. The Commission publishes a tariff, and the district operates according to its terms, which are equal to all alike.

The Commission also serves as the Navigation, Canal and Pilot Commission and appoints the Houston pilots, fixing the rules and regulations under which they operate.

The Navigation District cooperates with the Federal Government in the maintenance and improvement of the Houston Ship Channel. In this program, the District provides, without charge to the government, all necessary and required spoil disposal grounds and pipeline and channel right-of-way easements. Operating earnings of the District are continually plowed back into the improvement of the channel.

Through Harris County the Navigation District collects a small tax to support interest and sinking fund payments on its outstanding bonds. The entire tax is used for retirement of bonded debt and for no other purpose.

There is no business in all Greater Houston that does not in some degree or other receive a return from the Port of



Houston, This statement is obvious when an analysis is made of the expenditures of a ship visiting this port. Just one ship left the following money in Houston in cold cash:

\$	2,650.00	for port charges
	17,000.00	to labor for handling cargo
	11,200.00	for fuel oil
	3,000.00	for provisions and stores
	1,000.00	for doctors, medical and miscellaneous items
	19,000.00	in wages to crew, much of which was spent in Houston

Just one ship spent almost \$60,000.00. During 1925, 1240 ocean vessels called at the Port of Houston, and if the barges and small vessels are added in, the sum would greatly increase.

The cash left behind by the marine industry is only a portion of the value of the port to the community. If the average citizen of Houston will think of the payrolls and the economic activity generated along the ship channel and add their payrolls and economic value to the community, he will likely see that the port is a large factor in the growth and commercial activity of Houston.

The Congress authorized on March 2, 1919, the construction of a thirty-two foot channel, the work on which commenced in May, 1920, and was completed in September, 1925.

The total cost of the Houston Ship Channel, construction and maintenance, to June 30, 1925, was \$12,029,250.00, of which Harris County contributed \$2,771,297.83. The City of Houston and Harris County have jointly contributed

\$7,700,000.00 for the construction of publicly owned water and rail terminal facilities which provide at publicly owned docks, berthing facilities for sixteen vessels at one given time.

The voters of Harris County approved in July, 1925, a bond issue authorizing the expenditure of \$1,500,000.00 to construct additional dock and other terminal facilities, the extension of the grain elevator, and further extension of the Public Belt Railroad.

Privately owned docks and industries represent at this time, an additional investment of \$125,000,000.00, which includes privately owned docks with a berthing space for an additional thirty-two vessels so that a total of forty-eight vessels may be docked at one time.

During the year ending June 30, 1925, 1240 ocean vessels navigated the Houston Ship Channel, and the value of their cargoes was \$457,823,882.00, exclusive of local traffic. During the year the Port Terminal Railroad Association, which operates the Public Belt Railroad, which serves a portion of the water front, handled 84,967 loaded cars, which does not include that portion of the water front which is served jointly and exclusively by the Southern Pacific and Missouri Pacific Lines.

The Port Authorities, with the approval of the United States Engineers, have established from the Turning Basin to

Green's Bayou, a distance of nine miles, harbor lines at a channel width of four hundred feet, within which no improvement may be constructed. Harbor lines from Green's Bayou to the Turning Basin are established at five hundred feet.

In one hundred years the channel grew from a dream to a reality. From the activities of the Port Authorities it is evident that in 1925 there was still a dream of larger things to come. The reality of that year was no static achievement; it was only a station which marked progress toward an ever-unfolding and growing goal.

Houston owes its eminence as a port to the vision, the courage, the faith, and the diligent perseverance of the citizenry. By such virtue does a state--or a nation--rise to meet the challenge of its potentialities. Because of this, the development of the Houston Ship Channel, in a small way, illustrates the processes through which Texas and the entire nation have achieved their successes.

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