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Coastal Bend History:

Historic Heritage Park



By: Robert Parks - History columnist for KRIS 6

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There once was a time when majestic mansions and historic homes lined the Bluff and the main streets of downtown Corpus Christi. The grand homes were a testament to the pioneering pride and successes of Corpus Christi's early residents. But, one by one, those houses began to disappear in the name of "progress". Beginning in the mid-1920s, commercial buildings on the Bluff gradually replaced the stately mansions that had stood for decades. The same was happening in downtown Corpus Christi.

The city's architectural heritage was being wiped out and few people even noticed.

By the 1960s, only a few old homes remained on the Bluff. Historic "Centennial House", built in 1849 and the oldest standing structure in Corpus Christi, was saved by the Corpus Christi Heritage Society in 1965. It and several other historic Bluff houses at the far southern end of the Bluff are the only homes that remain standing in their original locations.



*Special Collections and Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
- Murphy Givens South Texas Historical Papers*

In 1974, the Nueces County Historical Society convinced the City Council to pass a historic preservation ordinance. It called for the creation of a Historic Landmark Commission to identify historic landmarks in the city and designate those structures as such. A designation would prevent the alteration or destruction of those structures without city council approval. Despite the fact that dozens of the city's historic structures were gone, the move to preserve what we

had left went into high gear. In 1975, the Junior League approached the city with a plan to save and restore two historic homes located in the newly created "Bayfront Arts and Science Park". The Sidbury House (1893) and the Julius Lichtenstein House (1905) had been bought by the city as part of its expansion of the park. The Sidbury house originally stood on the Bluff at Upper Broadway and Leopard, while the Lichtenstein home was moved from its original location in 1929 to make way for the construction of the Ritz Theater.

Both houses would probably have been demolished, but the city agreed to turn them over to the Junior League for restoration at League expense. The city agreed to pay for utilities and maintenance of the two structures. The Junior League would spend \$180,000 and 2 years restoring the Sidbury House, and \$70,000 for the Lichtenstein home. A third historic house in the same block of N. Chaparral was built by Corpus Christi businessman, Simon Gugenheim, in 1905. It was the last Victorian-style turreted house remaining in the city. The Junior League had considered also restoring this unique house, but simply did not have the funds to do so. In March of 1977, the city-owned house was scheduled for demolition, but, at the last minute, the Camp Fire Girls organization agreed to take on the restoration and make the house their headquarters. Through fundraisers and donations, the Camp Fire Girls raised the \$100,000 needed to restore the Gugenheim House and opened it to the public in 1979.

The Gugenheim House Restoration Project



The Gugenheim House is located in the corner of North Chaparral at Resaca Street in the Bayfront Green for the Arts & Sciences.

Built in the early 1880's the Gugenheim House is a fine example of the Victorian style of architecture.

The Camp Fire Girls urgently need your help to save this historic old house in Corpus Christi

The Simon Gugenheim House has a corner on history. Corpus Christi's only turreted house, pure Victorian in character, the house has now been moved to the corner of the 1600 block of North Chaparral at Resaca Street, for restoration by the Camp Fire Girls.

The Gugenheim House, through efforts of the Nueces County Historical Commission and the Landmark Commission of the City of Corpus Christi, will be identified by an official Texas Historical Marker by the Texas Historical Commission.

A Message from The Fund Raising Committee

The Gugenheim House Restoration Project is a community effort to preserve and use an important part of our past, so that we and future generations may appreciate and enjoy our area's heritage.

We seek to preserve this one-of-a-kind Victorian home through donations, large and small, from individuals and organizations in the community it will grace.

Your contribution to this effort will be appreciated now...and in the future.

Sincerely,
Cecil Burney
Chairman

Mrs. Patrick A. Flynn
Co Chairman

Corpus Christi Camp Fire Girls

The purpose of the Corpus Christi Camp Fire Girls is to help young people grow into adults who hold a set of personal values, know right from wrong, feel responsible for their community and country, and who care about and for other human beings. Camp Fire helps each individual develop the skills necessary to function effectively in society and participate in making and influencing the decisions that affect each life.

The future of the Gugenheim House is bright, as the Camp Fire Girls and the Gugenheim House Restoration Project Committee direct a fundraising campaign for immediate restoration.

The Gugenheim House

The Gugenheim House Restoration Project is a focal point for all local members. As they help the adult citizens of the area work to preserve a symbol of our past, they work for a permanent home for Camp Fire itself. A home that will serve not only the Camp Fire of the future, but the larger community in which most will spend their lives.

Following its restoration, the Gugenheim House will provide office and meeting space for the Corpus Christi Camp Fire Girls, Inc., and will provide residents and visitors an opportunity to enjoy proof that our past can be a viable part of our future.

CLIP, FILL IN
AND MAIL TO:

Camp Fire Girls
3210 Reid Drive
Corpus Christi, TX
78404



I want to help the Camp Fire Girls restore the Gugenheim House.

Enclosed is my check for \$100.00 \$20.00
\$50.00 \$10.00

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Signature _____

I wish to pledge \$ _____ I will meet my pledge () annually () quarterly

Signature _____

Contributed Photo - Robert Parks

By 1980, the restored Sidbury, Lichtenstein, and Gugenheim houses became the nucleus of what was being called the "Old Town" section of the Bayfront Arts and Science Park. All three homes received historical designations from the Texas Historical Foundation and would later be

added to the "National Register of Historic Places". Plans were underway to landscape the area and perhaps add additional historic Corpus Christi homes that were in danger of being lost. The City agreed to fund the nearly \$250,000 needed for the landscaping infrastructure....irrigation, walkways, and lawns.... surrounding the restored homes. An additional \$30,000 would be raised by private donations to create Victorian style gardens around the houses. A gazebo, 1890's gas lighting, and picket fencing were also added, reminiscent of the era in which the houses were built.

Between 1980 and 1983, four additional historic Corpus Christi homes were moved into the "Old Town" area to be restored. These included the Merriman-Bobys House, built in 1851 and the second oldest home in the City, the Galvan House, built in 1908 and the home of Rafael Galvan, a founding member of LULAC. Also, the Grande-Grossman House (1904), built by cantina owner, Ben Grande, and later owned by the Grossman family of Russian immigrants, and the Ward-McCampbell House (1908), a magnificent example of Classic Revival architecture were added to "Old Town".



Contributed Photo - Robert Parks / Grande-Grossman House



Contributed Photo - Robert Parks / French-Galvan House



Contributed Photo - Robert Parks / McCampbell House

In May of 1984, the move was on to give the area known as "Old Town" a more distinctive name. Suggestions included "Victorian Village", "By Gone Boulevard", "Memory Lane", "Heritage Plaza", and "Heritage Park". In a 6-5 vote, the Landmark Commission chose "Heritage Park", which was unanimously approved by the City Council. In July 1984, a \$438,000 contract was issued by the city to construct a plaza in front of the Galvan House, creating a center point for the homes in the two block long Heritage Park.



Bryan Hoffman – KRIS News

Today, Heritage Park is beautifully maintained and is popular with tourists and locals alike. The site has become a popular wedding venue, as well as hosting numerous cultural, art, and community events throughout the year. The annual Jazz Festival and the monthly "Market Days" attract hundreds of visitors to the park. A total of 12 historic homes now occupy the site. The Littles-Martin House (1910) joined the site in 1985, the Jalufka-Govatos House (1908) in 1988, the Buddy Lawrence House (1893) in 1998, the Mary Carroll House (1911) in 2006, and Steamboat House (1890) in 2007.

Robert Parks is a special contributor to KRIS 6 News. Parks was a history teacher at Carroll High School for 19 years and is now retired. His knowledge of Corpus Christi history makes him a unique expert in the subject.



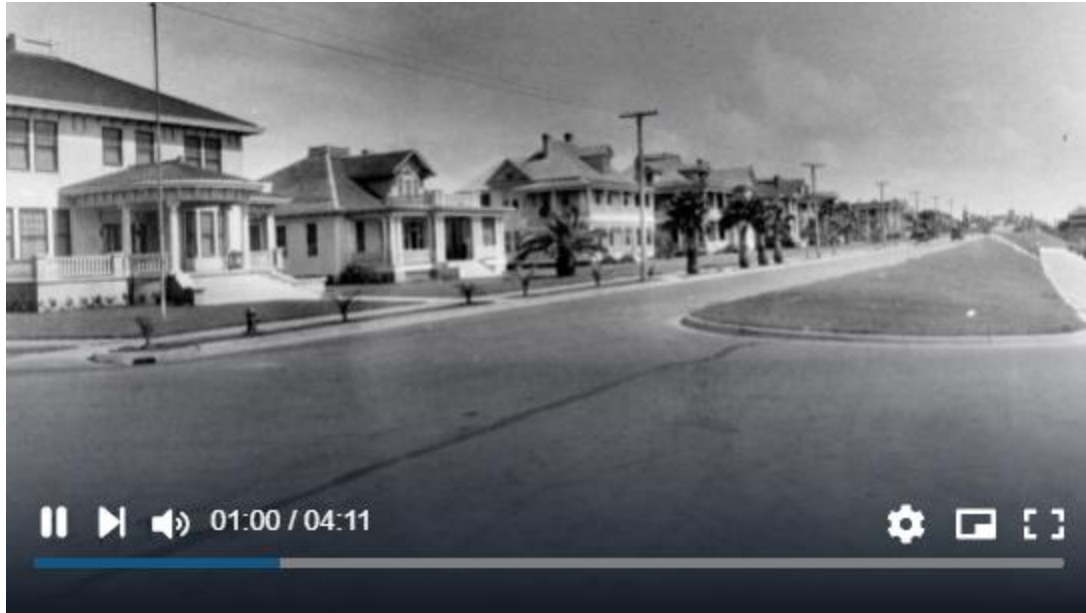
See screenshots of this video below.











A place for past

Historic preservation is in spirit of bygone era

By CECIL BURNLEY

When an old timer was asked what was best in his childhood — before cars and television — he usually began: "Well, I was young!" We all like to remember. Nostalgia has become a commodity which is marketed in the stores and in the marketplace.

Corpus Christians are much like all other Americans in their occasional yearning for the "good old days." It is easy to drift back to time when the pace seemed a little slower, more relaxing, more secure, more tranquil.

"Those were the days that

I could make it;

The pace was slower, and was better."

Historic preservation was born from this spirit and this desire. We need to preserve that part of our civilization that is old so we can be reminded of another day. It is our tie to the past — our security blanket. Since the "Pan American Prologues," we learn from the cultural contributions of our predecessors.

For hundreds of years, England has preserved structures with historic significance.

The ordinance calls for the creation of a Historic Landmark Commission. The major responsibilities of this commission include: (A.) They must prepare a historic landmark preservation plan for the City Council's adoption and (B.) They must locate and designate

building sites and districts eligible for the historic landmark designation.

The commission will be composed of fifteen citizens of this community.

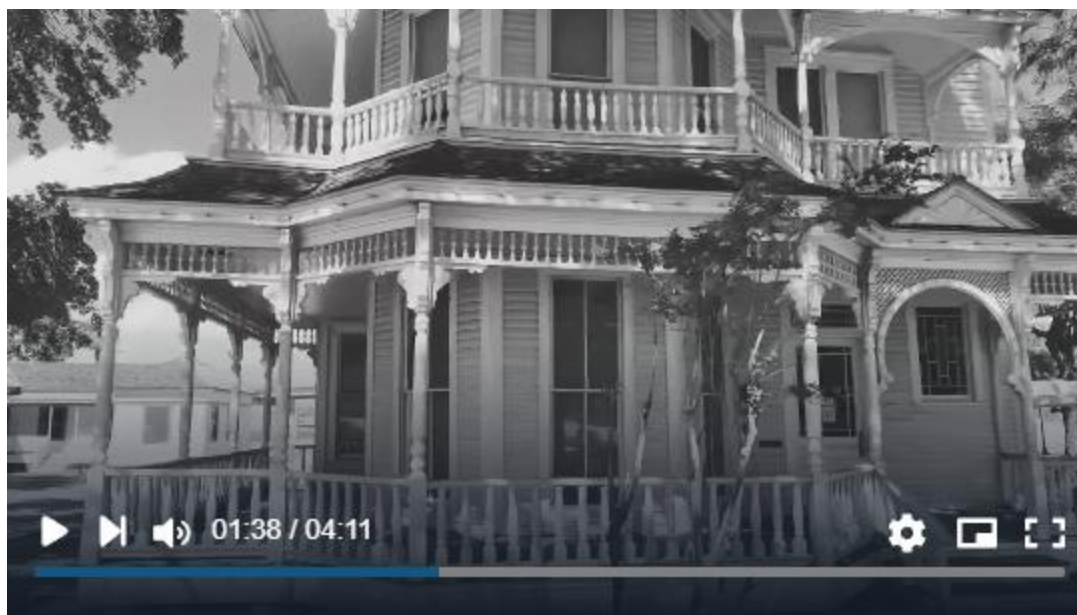
Once the historical landmark designation is affixed to a structure, it cannot be altered or demolished without a permit. The Landmark Commission reviews each request through the process of public hearings. Eventually, it is up to the City Council to grant or deny the request.

While the historical zoning ordinance is not the total solution to increasing and reviving many of our older landmarks, it will increase citizen awareness and attention to their importance. With the passage of the ordinance, the city can add — mix the new with the old and preserve for future generations a sense of what the city has been, is and will become in the



RESIDENCE AT 915 BUFFALO WITHIN SIGHT OF TOWN







Plan Is To Save 2 Old Houses

By JIM DAVIS
Staff Writer

The Junior League is trying to put together a project for restoring and saving two old houses in the Bayfront Arts and Science Park expansion area.

City Council members yesterday approved a letter of understanding designed to lead to a contract with the League on the Lichtenstein House at 1617 N. Chaparral and the Sidbury House at 1619 N. Chaparral.

City Manager Marvin Townsend said the League's action "is a tremendous showing of confidence, faith and guts."

The Sidbury House, located at the corner of Chaparral and Hughes, is a large Victorian style structure. The city-League proposal calls for the League to restore the interior and exterior, conduct public tours of the lower floor and have League offices on the second floor.

The Lichtenstein House is a smaller structure next

door and after restoration would be used as a "creative arts center" established in cooperation with the city and the school district.

Another old house next door to the Lichtenstein House was looked at by the League but it was decided restoration would not be attempted.

All three houses were owned by Mrs. Mona Bates until purchased by the city recently for the park expansion. Mrs. Bates currently is leasing the houses from the city, using one as her home and renting the others.

The letter of understanding approved yesterday opens the way for the League to attempt to raise funds for the restoration. It says basically that the city will sign a contract with the League when certain conditions are met.

The city has agreed to be responsible for utilities, janitorial services, maintenance and liability insurance for both houses at an estimated annual cost of \$5,000.





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Restored Sidbury House stands ready for dedication ceremony today
(Photo by John Best)

Sidbury House restoration is finished and so the dedication festivities begin

By MIKE MORVAN
Reporter

Yesterday it was a battle of various houses, their paintings and stage, but today it will be a parade, coronation and guided tour as the Junior League of Oregon Coast dedicates its new, prime attraction of the century Sidbury House. Dedication begins with a parade at 1 p.m. The parade route leads from City Hall through the downtown area to the 18th-century home in 400 N. Commercial, over the river city walkway to the Haystack and old Seward Park. Leaving the parade will be about 20 antique

cars, followed by bicycles, and the rest of the parade, and the Junior League School band.

After the parade, dedication ceremonies will be held in front of the old house, followed by free guided tours between 3 and 5 p.m. The street in front of the house will be closed all day for the occasion.

Opening the final chapter in restoration of the house yesterday was John Hagan, director of Lincoln's Historic County Heritage Society. See House, page B3







tain House — all of which will comprise the 'old town' area of the Gaymont Arts and Sciences Park. The Junior League and the Arts Council have restored the Lickbush House, and the League plans to restore the Sidbury House. The Camp Fire Girls have offered to restore the Guggenheims House if the City Council approves.









