



Public Bath House, 3-H Community Center, Bordersville. John Zemanek, architect, 1975

New Water Mains, Mall Come To Bordersville

The work of installing city water mains in Bordersville should be completed by the end of the summer. A five-mile square section northeast of Houston Intercontinental Airport near the intersection of I-59 and FM 1960, Bordersville has long been recognized as one of Space City's poorest and most underserved communities. Installation of the water mains comes some 17 years after Bordersville was annexed by the City of Houston.

Although community leaders and the area's estimated 600 residents are eager to see running water in Bordersville for the first time, some say that the predominantly black population will not have long to enjoy this or other city services promised for the future. Construction of the new Deerbrook Mall, a project of Homart Development, is expected to begin in July 1982, and be completed spring 1984. Sandwiched between the new mall to the east and the rapidly developing FM 1960 area on the west, Bordersville residents are experiencing an unprecedented increase in their property values—one which may drive them out of their homes before all the streets in the area are paved or city sewer service is connected.

"It's an interesting contradiction," says Dave Knotts of Houston Metropolitan Ministries which along with the Bordersville Neighborhood Council worked with city officials to arrange the federal funding that paid for the newly installed water mains. "In Bordersville you have some of the poorest people in Houston, many living in substandard housing, but sitting on property that is in the path of commercial and residential development."

That development may not be beneficial to the Bordersville community, according to A. W. Jones, who has headed efforts to bring city services to Bordersville since the early 1960's. Jones is the executive director of the Bordersville Neighborhood Council and president of the Aldine Independent School District, as well as the owner of two of the few locally-owned businesses, Betty's Barbeque and A. W. Auto Sales.

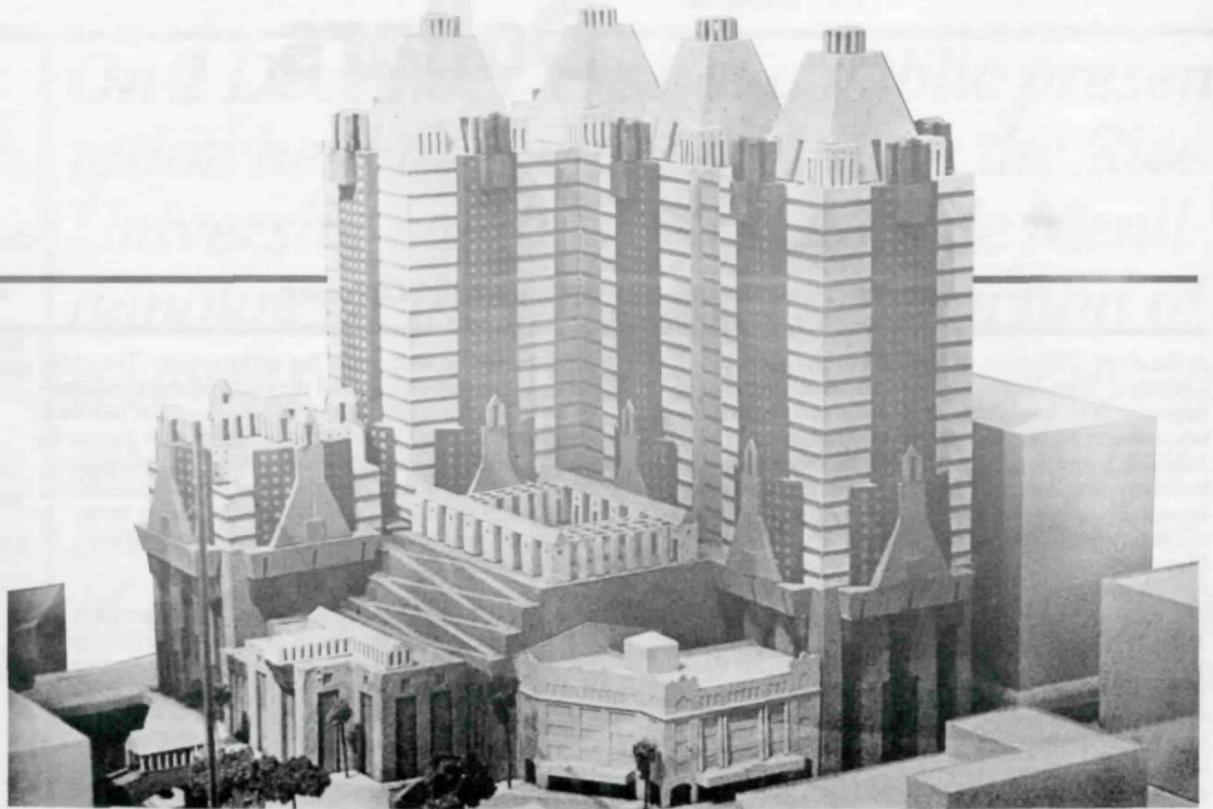
"Some of the houses our older residents live in have been here since the 1930's. They have outhouses instead of sewer connections, and they probably wouldn't meet the city code if they were inspected," Jones explains. "They would be almost impossible to sell. But the property tax assessments have risen quite a bit. The elderly people will be protected somewhat by the senior citizens' residential property tax exemption. In five or 10 years the taxes will drive the young people such as myself out. We'll have to sell."

In 1927, according to Equila Jackson, a longtime Bordersville resident, "the black people were pushed out of Humble and moved over here to where there was a sawmill," one operated by Edgar Borders, who provided employment and living quarters around the sawmill for many of the families who moved into the area. The sawmill closed in 1941 when Borders died, but the area retained his name, and many of the residents stayed. "There was yard work and domestic work, and not much else," says A. W. Jones.

John Zemanek, writing in the July/August 1978 issue of *Texas Architect*, maintained that when the City of Houston incorporated part of Bordersville in 1965, "to make way for construction of the new intercontinental airport—180 Bordersville families were included in the annexation, and 40 were not. When city tax notices came, the new Houston residents inquired about the city services and utilities to which their tax dollars would entitle them. None would be forthcoming, the city said, since only newly annexed communities of 200 or more families were eligible."

Four years of effort to get federal funds for new water lines began to pay off in 1981, when the Houston City Council authorized the use of \$412,000 in federal Community Development funds. An estimated \$40,000 more must be authorized by city council to install "tap and meter lines" connecting most of the houses in the area to the new mains. Such lines normally cost between \$600 and \$800, according to A. W. Jones. In an effort to help Bordersville residents unable to pay these charges, the community organized a "Gift Of Water For Christmas" drive in 1981 that raised \$104,000. Federal officials have ruled that the city cannot charge residents the regular fees for these lines, however, and Jones says the charity money will be spent on other improvements to some 80 houses in the Bordersville area. JWB

Citelines



RepublicBank ignored Graves' "unfeasible" alternative. Photograph © Express-News Corporation

Bank Rejects Graves Plan, Starts Demolition of Texas Theater

The struggle between RepublicBank of San Antonio and the San Antonio Conservation Association (SACS) ended in early July, when bank officials rejected a plan put together to save the historic Texas Theater from demolition.

The 3,000-seat Spanish Revival style theater, built in the 1920's, was designed by Robert Otto Boller (1887-1962) of Kansas City. It is one of 127 theaters designed by the architectural firm of Boller Brothers and one of a number of spectacular "movie palaces" in San Antonio.

RepublicBank of San Antonio, owner of the property, is demolishing the theater (while preserving its facade) to make way for a three-building complex around a plaza opening onto the adjacent San Antonio Riverwalk. The design for the proposed complex was prepared by the San Antonio firm Ford, Powell and Carson.

The SACS obtained a restraining order from a federal district court in San Antonio, staying demolition of the theater while the group prepared studies to show the bank how the theater could be saved. Alex Caragonne of the San Antonio firm of Reyna Caragonne put together a team which prepared an alternate plan for bank manage-

ment, including the engineering firm of Espey, Huston, financial analysts Shlaes and Company of Chicago, and architect Michael Graves.

The plan they put together was intended to show RepublicBank that "we want the bank downtown and we want the theater," according to Mary Fenstermaker, a spokesperson for SACS. Fenstermaker said that the group's primary goal was to preserve the theater by creating "a design that is financially attractive to the bank for their operations." The court-ordered agreement between the bank and SACS expired on July 12, however, without any change by bank officials.

Michael Graves presented drawings and models to bank officials on July 8, and made another presentation to the board of SACS and others later that day. The plan was made public on July 9, but that same day RepublicBank announced at a separate press conference that it was rejecting the plan as "economically unfeasible." The SACS then announced its offer to buy the entire site from the bank for \$12.2 million. The bank also rejected this offer.

Mary Fenstermaker says that the bank had installed demolition barricades and begun to remove interior fixtures before the agreement ran out at midnight July 12. The marquee from the west side of the theater was removed by mid-July, but structural demolition had not begun as this story went to press. JWB

O'Neil Ford 1905-1982

O'Neil Ford, the well-known San Antonio architect, died on Tuesday, 20 July, after suffering a heart attack. He was seventy-six years old. Ford was born 3 December 1905 at Pink Hill, Texas. Although he was a student for two years at North Texas State Teachers' College in Denton, Ford received no academic training in architecture other than an International Correspondence School course of study. Instead, from 1926 until 1930 he worked for the Dallas architect David R. Williams. Apprenticeship turned into collaboration and together Williams and Ford invented the Texas regional school of architecture based upon their extensive surveys of indigenous nineteenth century buildings in Texas, Louisiana and northern Mexico.

Ford spent the entire length of his career promoting the values of this responsive architecture. He opposed the historical eclecticism of the 1920s and 1930s as strongly as the "machine style" late Modern architecture of the post-World War II era, denouncing both for being obsessed with the issue of style to the exclusion of all other considerations. Ford wrote little, but he talked a great deal. Conversations—and public addresses—tended to become polemics on the inexhaustible lessons to be learned from vernacular buildings, the beauty of handicraft in architecture, the mendaciousness of the architectural profession and the need to build thoughtfully, considerably and humanely.

After working in several federal New Deal reconstruction programs, Ford worked on the rehabilitation of La Villita in San Antonio. This led to his pioneering involvement with historic preservation and urban conservation in Texas. It also led to his marriage to Wanda Graham in 1941 and his decision to remain in San Antonio.

During World War II Ford served as a civilian flying

instructor in the U.S. Army Air Force. From 1940 until 1953 he practiced in association with Jerry Rogers and in the later 1950s maintained an office in Denver with Carl F. Groos, Jr. In 1967 the firm of O'Neil Ford and Associates was reorganized as Ford, Powell and Carson, admitting Boone Powell and Chris Carson to partnership. Out-spoken and non-conformist, Ford nonetheless managed to win the patronage of the luminaries of the Texas establishment and he and his associates have designed buildings in almost every city in Texas.

Ford was honored as one of the "People's Architects" by Rice University in 1963. He was Thomas Jefferson Memorial Professor at the University of Virginia in 1967, he received the National Council on the Arts Presidential Award in 1968 and had the unusual distinction of being declared a National Landmark by the Council in 1974. In 1980 the University of Texas created the O'Neil Ford Chair of Architecture and completed funding for the endowment in 1982. Despite his intermittent anti-academic grumblings, Ford was very proud of this honor but modestly declined to be named the first O'Neil Ford Professor of Architecture at the university.

It was generally conceded that Ford's personality was his most compelling design, attaining a level to which most of the rest of his architecture never quite reached. Yet for better or worse he achieved what he and Dave Williams had set out to do over a half-century ago: he created a Texas school of architecture of which he managed to be, in his own inimitable fashion, prize pupil, head master and chairman of the board of trustees.

Funeral services for O'Neil Ford were held on Friday, 23 July, at the Parker Chapel at Trinity University.

Stephen Fox