

## **JOHN PHELPS COURT HOUSE ANNEX # 4**

Pasadena, Texas' nearest border to the City of Houston lies roughly ten miles east southeast of downtown Houston, between Interstate 45, East Sam Houston Toll way and the Houston Ship Channel. The John Phelps Court House Annex #4 site is located in the far northeast quarter of the original plat of Pasadena in Outlot 29. Outlot 29 is generally bounded by Shaw Street on the north, South Richey on the west, and Texas State Highway 225, known also as the La Porte Highway, to the south.

The first inhabitants in and around the modern day city of Pasadena, Texas were American Indians, from the tribe called the Karankawa, and sometimes spelled with a C. These people were fond of fish and shell fish, but also prone to cannibalism which made them somewhat less than friendly. French and Spanish explorers, including Cabasa de Vaca passed here and traded with these local aborigines. Pasadena is situated where Vince's Bayou empties into Buffalo Bayou, but at this point, Buffalo Bayou is now called The Houston Ship Channel. Bayous are usually deep, narrow rivers of stagnant water that seem to be unique to Texas. Field notes, authored by some of the early surveyors of Harris County, often gave a lesson on how to pronounce the word bayou, "buy-O".

In 1836, before the Battle of San Jacinto, Vince Bayou had a cedar wooden bridge spanning it. This was the bridge that Deaf Smith and his men burned on the orders of General Sam Houston to keep the Mexican army from using it. A new bridge is noted by the County road overseer, as being completed over Vince's bayou on July 31, 1872. Harris County paid John Curry \$ 450.00 for the construction of this bridge. It was at the junction of Vince's and Buffalo Bayous, which is now Pasadena, that Mexico's General Santa Anna was captured, while masquerading as a peasant.

The founding of the City of Pasadena was still far in the distant future. Even though settlers began to emerge as early as the 1820's, the area was slow to develop. It remained an open prairie, with scattered use by cattlemen, until the railroad came to La Porte, a few miles down the road, in 1892.

The prairies between Buffalo Bayou, Galveston Bay, Clear Lake and the Brazos River afforded natural water fences for the free-range cattle and ranchers. In C. F. Duer's diary, he wrote about Allen Vince's August 1844 denial of having given authorization to H. Price to "gather up unmarked cattle in the cove, but says that he will gather up his scattering cattle out of the cove and let me have them." Cattle ran free until the Fence Stock Law came about in 1930. When Frederick Law Olmsted came to Texas in 1852 - 1853 with his brother they noted a "fenced pasture, almost the only one we saw in Texas." The fenced pasture Olmsted observed was on the north side of Buffalo Bayou, south of Carpenter's Bayou, where the fifty-acre fenced market garden of Colonel John Haywood Manly was growing vegetables for the Galveston and Harris County market houses. Olmsted also observed cattle branding. There was a "season for the annual gathering and branding of the calves with a cattle drive which usually included several neighbors coming together at an agreed place. The herded cattle, "all cattle having their marks and all calves following their cows," and driven into prepared pens. The cattle were divided,

“each man’s driven into a separate pen, calves branded and all turned loose again.” Olmsted noted that brands of the new owner were placed above the old one, “and such double-brand is prima-facie evidence of a transfer.”

It was not until 1893 that John H. Burnett founded the town of Pasadena which was named in honor of Pasadena, California, because of its abundant vegetation. The railroad was built through the town site in 1894. Farmers took advantage of the railroads arrival by settling the area, raising produce, and shipping their goods by train. Burnett platted the town in 1895. The first independent school district in Harris County was founded in 1899 by the residents of Pasadena.

The twentieth century saw Pasadena begin to really emerge as industrial giant. But, first it had to go through the 1900 hurricane that destroyed Galveston and many other cities and towns along the Texas coast. In a way it somewhat helped and pointed to the path the town should take in the future. The director of the American Red Cross, Clara Barton, shipped one and one half million strawberry plants to the farmers of the Pasadena area. Strawberry farming soon became a way of life, and Pasadena, the Strawberry capital of the United States, if not the world. By the 1920’s all of southeast Harris County had come to be known as “Pasadena Acres”.

The farmers not only grew strawberries, but cantaloupes, and cucumbers, along with other produce. When President Woodrow Wilson opened the Port of Houston with its deep ship channel to the world, it gave Pasadena another shot in the arm. New industries began to move onto the land adjacent to the ship channel. J. S. Cullinan, founder and President of the Texas Company, which had its beginning digging earth storage tanks, moved his company headquarters to Houston signaling the beginning of the oil boom and tagging the area as the Energy Capital of the World. Other oil and chemical companies soon followed suit with refineries, manufacturing, generating, and an array of plants producing scientific products the likes of that world has never seen. Buffalo Bayou or the ship channel offers water, which can be used to move the vast cargos by huge freighters from one nation to another, in addition to satisfying the thirsty industrial plants who require the liquid to cool their boilers, engines, and other machinery. The shoreline became a maze of these industrial giants.

Besides J. S. Cullinan and his Texas Company, some of the earlier companies to establish themselves along the ship channel were the Humble Oil and Refining Company, who struck oil at Goose Creek, now known as Baytown. After a half dozen name changes, Humble is now known as Exxon/Mobil. Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company began exploration in Texas during the early 1920’s. Shell purchased the old Roxana Oil Company and Dixie Oil Company, and soon constructed their refinery at Deer Park. Shell also constructed a chemical plant near the refinery. Between Shell Oil Company’s Deer Park plant, and Pasadena, the Beck Land and Cattle Company, otherwise known as the Jones Ranch owned a great deal of the land , which was used for farming and pastureland. Eventually, the oil and chemical companies purchased the Jones Ranch to erect manufacturing facilities.

Another ranch in the Pasadena area, the Allen Ranch founded by Samuel Allen, was sold in 1917 to Sinclair Oil Company to build their new refinery. It is now know as Lyondell-Basell. Crown Central Petroleum began their refinery about one year later, adjacent to the east side of Shaver

Street, across which Champion Paper and Fibre mill was opened in 1937. 1924 saw Houston Lighting and Power Company erecting its Deepwater Power Plant along the Houston Ship Channel. The town of Deepwater is now a part of Pasadena. Phillips Petroleum began their refinery in 1929. Across the channel, Warren Petroleum, American Petroleum, and Sheffield Steel later claimed a share of the north side of the Houston Ship Channel.

The war years and immediately thereafter saw tremendous growth in the area. Industry kept pouring in. 1942 saw shipbuilding companies such as Houston Shipbuilding, Brown Shipbuilding and San Jacinto Shipbuilding set employment records. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company opened for business in 1943. Petro Tex and Tenneco soon followed. 1950 witnessed the long awaited opening of the Washburn Tunnel linking Pasadena with Galena Park, thus making the Pasadena Ferry obsolete. The 1960's and 70's were filled with more new industries moving to new locations on both sides of the Houston Ship Channel. Stauffer Chemical Company, Signal Oil and Gas, United States Steel, Continental Oil Company, Proler Steel, Platzer Boat Works, Lone Star Cement were a few of the new industries along the bayou near Pasadena.