

Transcripts of lectures from The Heritage Society's Hill/Finger Lecture Series have been provided by Adept Word Management, The Transcription Experts.

Hill/Finger Lecture Series presents
Plans for the Julia Ideson Building
Phoebe Tudor and Barry Moore
January 8, 2009

Welcome to The Heritage Society's Hill/Finger Lecture Series. This is the fourth year that we've been offering this program, and I want to acknowledge the support of William Hill and the Jerry and Nanette Finger Foundation for making the Hill/Finger lectures possible. A few announcements before I introduce our speakers. We are about to open a wonderful exhibition that we've done in collaboration with Joe Pratt and the Center For History at U of H, and that is *Creating Space City USA*. The exhibition will open to the public on January 13, and it will be on view through April 26th. You are all certainly welcome to join us for the exhibit reception on Friday, January 23 and for the *Out of This World Family Day* on Sunday, January 25th. We'd love to have you. The *Out of The World Family Day* starts at 1:00 on Sunday. Another event that is in the near future for us, is our annual *Houston Heritage Luncheon* on Thursday, February 12, and again this year the Keno brothers are going to serve as our featured speakers. The luncheon is at 11:30 on the 12th of February at the River Oaks Country Club, and we would love to have your attendance; so if you would like to join us, please let me know. We'll also have an exhibition at the Antique Dealers Association Show at the George R. Brown Convention Center, and the show is February 13-15. Next month, Hill/Finger lecture is going to be presented by Patricia Prather, who is Executive Director of Texas Trailblazers Preservation Association. Ms. Prather is going to be talking about Houston's African-American Community and its influences from 1865 to about 1918. We hope to see you next month as well.

We're very lucky and very honored to have today's speakers and especially to hear about this wonderful project at the Julia Ideson Library. As I'm sure you know, the building was designed by the Boston architectural firm of Cram and Goodhue with William Ward Watkin as the local architect on the project back in 1926. It has it been two years ago now that Phoebe Tudor and Margaret Skidmore and Minnette Boesel came together, I think, at the request of our mayor, Bill White, to help raise some funding to do some restoration work on the building and to add the wing of the building that was designed initially but never constructed. This is a very exciting time and I believe the groundbreaking is finally going to be held this coming Monday, January 12. Phoebe Tudor is Chairman of Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners. Phoebe holds a Master's degree in historic preservation from Columbia University and has worked as an architectural historian for the Historic District Landmarks Commission in New Orleans. Phoebe has served on the boards of a lot of organizations down here—Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, The Heritage Society, Rice Design Alliance, Hermann Park Conservancy, and Houston Ballet. She has been very generous with her time in helping chair many charity events throughout this city for a long time so many of us are very grateful to Phoebe for her efforts. Phoebe's also the founder and president of Friends of the Rice House, which is a group that was

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formed to save the William Ward Watkin house that's now the official residence of the president of Rice University. It is truly a wonderful house. Thank you. Barry Moore is Senior Associate with Gensler's Houston office, and I'm sure you all know that Gensler has a wide visibility across our country. I think there are Gensler offices in 35 cities. Barry's expertise is in historic preservation in theaters and in educational facilities. Barry serves as an adjunct professor at the Hines College of Architecture at the U of H, and he's been there since 1987 and was a founding director of the Workshop for Historic Architecture. A fellow of the American Institute of Architects and past president of the Houston chapter of AIA, Mr. Moore has a long standing relationship with The Heritage Society. He's served on our board of directors and assisted in a lot of projects over the years; but he has very deep ties to The Heritage Society as his dad, Harvin Moore, and his aunt, Faith Bybee, were among the original founders of The Heritage Society in 1954. Enough from me; let's hear about this wonderful project. Help me welcome Phoebe Tudor and Barry Moore.

Phoebe Tudor

Thank you, Alice. We are very happy to be here, and as she said, it's a wonderful time to have this discussion because we are almost on the eve of our groundbreaking next Monday at 11 a.m. It's open to the public. You are all welcome to come if you'd like to turn up and help us celebrate because we're really very excited that we're about to get started with building the archival storage wing. A little bit of the history of how this came to be. As Alice said, really it was at the initiation of Mayor White who has a great personal interest in history. He's very knowledgeable about Houston history. I think the location of the Ideson Library so close to City Hall is an advantage because I think he drives by it every day, and it is one of the, sad to say, few historic buildings in this area. It is a real treasure. He called me, he called Margaret Skidmore, he called Minnette Boesel; and when we all found out who the other people were that he was talking to, we said, we'll get with Barry. Luckily, we started out as sort of the trio. One of our first acts was to hire Margaret Lawler as our Executive Director, who is also here with us today. She's done a terrific job. We really started from the beginning to try to figure out how we would accomplish what we wanted to do with the library. We've worked hand in hand with the Houston Public Library and the Houston Public Library Foundation. We established our own 501(c)3 so that we could independently fundraise for this. That's our sole purpose is to fundraise. We hired the architects. We really wanted to work with Barry, so there was not a lot of question who we would go after, and he's been fantastic with this whole process and probably knows more about the project than anyone in the world. We put together a wonderful board, an advisory board, and looked at it from the ground up. Constructing the wing that was originally designed but never built turned out to be the best way to handle the issues of the building, which has, since the late 70s, been the home of the Municipal Archives, the Texas Room, and the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. Because the building is from the 20s, it was not built to be an archive. There are issues with archival storage that needed to be addressed and updated. As we all know, technology has advanced so far, and there are so many new things that you can do with your storage of your photographs, your architectural drawings and all of the books and manuscripts that they have there at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. The way to

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address that problem, we felt, was to construct a wing that would be a start-of-the-art archival storage wing. When that is completed, we will move the materials from the Houston Metropolitan Research Center into their new home in the archival storage wing. There will be a new reading room on the ground floor of the wing that will serve the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. I know Barry and all the architects have worked really closely with the staff of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. They've had many meetings with Friends of the Texas Room, and we feel and hope that we addressed the issues that they need to have addressed, including security of the collection. I know initially one of the things that was talked about was that currently—probably most of you are familiar with the building—the Texas Room is located over here and some of the archival materials are in the center of the building. Consequently they have to be brought back and forth and it's not necessarily a secure environment. With the new plan, we will have that all taken care of because all the archive material is going to be self-contained in the wing. We're very thrilled and happy that we're in a position to start the wing, and our architects are telling us it's going to be about 11 months process providing no hurricanes come along to slow down the process. Hopefully, by this time next year, we will be ready to have a ribbon cutting and open the wing. Once that's completed, then we will begin the restoration of the original building. Of course, all the materials have to be transferred first. I would be happy to take any questions as I go along or at the end of the presentation. We have a PowerPoint that Barry's put together that we'd like to show you with some of the historic photographs, and then Barry will take you through some of the plans for the project.

This drawing that we have here is special because it was drawn by Barry's father, Harvin Moore, and this is a view of the library from 1935.

This mural is in the library. I see some smiles out there because you're probably familiar with it. It is a depiction from the mural of the Houston Lyceum, which was a private lending library that preceded the Houston Public Library and basically morphed into the Houston Public Library. I think it was founded in 1854 and I think the Houston Public Library came into being 50 years after that.

This is Julia Ideson. She was a graduate of the first library science program at the University of Texas in 1903 and immediately came to work at the public library at its early years. She was the director until 1944. Clearly, Ideson Library is named for her. She was the director when we had the original Carnegie Library, which was the library building here in Houston after the Lyceum. It was located at the corner of Travis and McKinney. It looks really big in this photograph. Apparently, it wasn't because they outgrew it pretty quickly and had to start plans to come up with a new library. Sadly, this building is no longer in existence, but we do have some materials from the Carnegie Library.

This was the circulation desk in the central part of the library, and the one thing that we like to point out is the Venus de Milo statue, which is right in the center. We have the Venus de Milo,

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and she's been a fixture in the Ideson building all along; and she will continue to be. Now it's on the second floor. It was at one point in the stair hall as well.

This is the reading room from the Carnegie Library. The key thing to notice in this slide are the chairs because we still have one and we are incorporating it into the renovation. We're going to have a little section that will feature some of these old items once we've gotten the project done.

This is the Meldrum Room in the Carnegie Library. The thing to notice in this slide is the flag against the back wall, which we have and has been in the Meldrum Room of the Julia Ideson Library, which was the children's room.

There was another Carnegie Library in town, the Carnegie Colored Library. It was a fine structure that was in Freedman's Town. Sadly it is also no longer with us.

This is the earliest postcard we found of the Julia Ideson Library from 1927. The library was dedicated in 1926, and here we have the first postcard and essentially looks just like it does today. The trees are a lot bigger. This is another view from 1938 - a second postcard.

Then we have the original drawings from Cram Goodhue. This is the McKinney elevation on the front of the building. This is the side elevation. Of course, what you can see here on the left is the original design for the wing that was never built; so everything from about right there to this side was not constructed. As Barry will show you when he gets to his portion, they utilized the original plans as the basis for their designs of the new wing.

This is a cross-section. What you can see in the middle clearly is the two-story atrium space that will be called the gallery. This is looking at it from the front entrance hall. This is the existing Texas Room, and you can see on the far side on the right of the sets. There are two floors per one floor of the building.

This is a 1927 photo; before the street went through. This is a 1929 landscape proposal from a firm in Chicago which shows an entire civic center complex downtown. The interesting thing about this—this is the location of the Ideson on this corner. It shows a complex of about five civic buildings that would have been built in the same style as the Ideson library. It included a city hall, a courthouse, and an auditorium. The central part which is, I guess, known as a reflecting pool is there; but none of the buildings were built in this style or along this plan. So the Ideson is the only building from this plan that was ever constructed. Of course, shortly thereafter the Great Depression came and all building pretty much stopped. Then City Hall was built in 1939 once things got going again, but of course by that time there was a new style that everybody wanted. Nothing else was built in this style at that time.

This was the original circulation desk in the ground floor foyer from 1927, which we do not have; but we are going to construct a new circulation desk or more of an information desk that

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will be in that location that they have designed based on the original. The lights are still here. Other than that, it's relatively similar. That clock is the one that's upstairs now. We still have one clock but we're not sure if it's that clock or if it's a similar clock. The floor is obviously absolutely the same. Then as you look at this, as you look at the foyer, the new wing and the new reading room will be directly behind this. We'll keep the arches there, and then you'll go through the arches to the new reading room.

Here's a 1927 photo of the auditorium. Again, it's relatively similar. The stage—I guess the surround—is still there. It's not lifted up but the surround is still there.

This is the Ideson Meldrum Room or the children's room, and you can see the plaques that we refer to from the previous Carnegie Library. You can also see some of the children's furniture that featured carvings of fairytale characters and children's characters. It's kind of hard to see but sort of right here in the backs of the chairs. We do also have some of those still and we're going to incorporate these into this little children's nook in that room that will showcase some of the original furniture that we have. Throughout this process, that's the thing that we've really heard most from people is their memories of going to the children's room when they were younger—either their parents taking them or more often from being dropped off while their moms when to shop; so lots and lots of people have experience with that room.

Here's the staircase and you can see there's Venus. She's no longer in that location because now that's where the mural is of the Lyceum ladies. She's now moved into the hallway on the second floor kind of to just continue along this way.

This was the reference area. This is the atrium. You can see that they did have card catalogues and desks in that area. Now that area is open, but we're looking into the original Texas Room through that entryway there.

This is the 1927 version of the Texas Room. We don't have the chintz curtains in there anymore, but other than that, it's very similar. It has become much more densely furnished, shall we say, with other shelving and equipment over the years, so once we have expanded and we have a separate reading room and other office areas, we're hoping to recreate this as closely as possible. We have about six or eight of the original tables and chairs, so we're hoping to get back close to that. This is another view looking back toward the atrium. This was the fine arts nook. The Texas Room of course still has all these bookcases.

These display cases, we still have those; still in good use. That's it for historic photos. I'm going to let Barry take over and talk about plans that we have now.

Barry Moore

I have to say that it's rare for me and the practice of historic preservation to be able to work on a building that's been so well cared for and so well maintained. The City of Houston deserves all

kinds of great credit for doing that as well as the library and the library staff. The building went through a major renovation in the mid 1970s by the Wilson, Morris, Crane, Anderson firm who did a very, very sensitive job; and a lot of what they have done we are able to keep in place and to maintain as it is. This is the door to the side that's now an emergency exit, but it's on the McKinney Street side. Then up above, there's an awful lot of wonderful detailing and cast stone that naturally we'll be preserving and cleaning. Also, I wanted to apologize. It's really hard to get a decent photograph of this building from the McKinney side because the wonderful trees have become much too wonderful. I believe next winter with the city forester, we're going to undertake a critical kind of pruning of these trees to bring them back from the façade of the building and also to open up the ground for a little more daylight for the general health of the courtyard and the tree and for the building itself.

This is what used to be an open loggia in 1926. The loggia that's closest to us here was enclosed early in the history of the library to make an indoor connection between the central part of the library and the western wing. The loggia that's nearest Smith Street was enclosed after that just to enlarge the floor space for the Texas room. Those are beautifully done and maintained and they will remain the way they are.

On the inside, there's a wonderful collection of WPA art. Houston doesn't have very much of that left from the 1930s. These murals were done in 1934/1935. There are three of these depicting the Spanish conquest of the new world, I think. It's appropriate for the architectural style of the building if for nothing else. Also, there's a great deal of wonderful detail inside the building. This is on the second floor of the atrium space before you enter the present Texas Room. Those little brackets we sometimes refer to nicely as the *frozen babies*. Then of course there are the same old tiles, the same old marble. We're going to strip that and clean it so it will get back down to sort of it's original look, but you'll recognize the place absolutely when you go into it.

Here's the chair from the Carnegie Library from 1904. I wish we could find more of those. We did find in the basement of the new library the 1904 cornerstone from Travis and McKinney Streets, so we're going to haul that up and put that in an appropriate place and use it as a coffee table, I think. Sorry for the quality of this picture, but there are lots and lots of pieces of furniture that were bought by the City of Houston in 1926. They're kind of in the Spanish style and very much appropriate for the building itself in the interior of the building. We've identified as much of that as we can, and we're using as much of that furniture as we possibly can. We have a budget to refinish and repair some of the pieces of furniture that are broken and also a good number of these original light fixtures throughout the building. These are going to be rewired, re-lamped in appropriate way and the chandelier will be restored as well, so it'll be much more efficient and more attractive when we finish.

Now, this is the complicated part. Of this building, I think probably most of you have a little experience climbing around behind the stacks and in some of the back spaces. There is a

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notorious elevator that's toward the west end on the west side of the stacks that has seven stops on it, and it has to be repaired about every six weeks. That's so that you can hit all the different levels of the building as well as the stack area. I'm going to just start by saying all the elevators are garbage. They're all coming out. We're going to do all new elevators, and this old elevator is going to have half as many stops as it has now, so we think that's a big improvement. To start with just to give you a quick overview, this is at the bottom. It's the first story. Next is level 1.5, we call it. Next is level 2 where the Texas Room is. Next level is 2.5 and then level 3. We thought we should also simplify it instead of calling it 5B and 4C and things like that. This is the final configuration of the building with the new wing.

This is a north/south cross section of the building so that the McKinney entrance is right here. The yellow place is where the new wing begins. The yellow area is a light well with a skylight on top of it that will mark the transition space between the historic building and the new wing. To the right on the new wing on the ground floor is the NEW Texas Room to be called Texas room which will be the archival reading and reference room. The three floors above that will be given over almost entirely to high-density shelving with staff-only access or staff plus recognized researchers and volunteer access.

This is a section in the other direction from west to east looking toward McKinney, so in the yellow area, what you see there is the existing façade that faces Smith Street. By putting a light well here, we're able to preserve the facade on that side of the central part of the library and by way of the light well to allow some natural daylight to continue to come into those windows in the public spaces in the library.

Right here, this area now from here all the way up to there is the stacks. The stacks are going away because they will be replaced by the high-density storage in the new wing. What we were able to do then on the first level, this will be a new floor right here. This is a photo lab, which is highly needed. Then from here to here, a two-story crawl space will be an exhibition space which we think will be one of the most heaviest used exhibition halls in the city. The city doesn't have such a thing right now.

Now here's a sort of floor by floor. If you'll indulge me, let me walk you through it. The front door is right here. This is the central area. This is the new archival wing down there. This is the photo lab here. Right now this the photo lab. As you can see, Joel, our photo archivist is smiling broadly. He gets down to about 2-1/2 times as much space as we have now. This is the auditorium—no major changes. On that side is the Reynolds Room and the Meldrum Room at the extreme far end. This is an existing service yard. This is a room for catering because we realize that this building will be used a lot for special events, and we wanted to make it as easy as possible for caterers to use the building. This is the notorious elevator.

This is our computer rendering of the new Texas Room. We've selected furniture that is compatible with the building and compatible with the old furniture but not an exact replica of

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that. This will be the place where you can use the city directories. You can use computer terminals to research the collection. You'll be able to access archives at this area as well.

This is a view of the auditorium. We are restoring all the historic light fixtures here, and these will be stackable, very useable chairs for mostly seating. We didn't want to replace those little hardwood funeral home chairs that were originally here in 1926.

This is floor 1-1/2. This area right in here is our new conservation lab. The library right now has a wonderful volunteer conservatory that works many, many hours a week and the worst possible sort of conditions for conservation. We're able to put the appropriate plumbing, the appropriate vent hoods and all of that in this area. Then this part becomes a volunteer space that we hope will be used mostly for conservation purposes.

This is the second floor which is actually the main public floor of the building. This is the floor of the exhibition hall and the OLD Texas Room at the far end. We're calling it the Old Texas Room because we hope to rename it on behalf of a donor. Another thing I did not mention is that this white area right there is the new loggia that was originally designed to be there, designed by Rob Adams' family and not built. We're putting that now on the Smith Street side, and it matches the loggias that are on the other side on the McKinney Street side.

These are the offices for the library director in this location, and up here will be the offices for the library board on the second floor. In the new archival wing, this is high-density shelving and a work area on one side. This is a rare book room. If you're familiar in the special collections now, there is a vault on the third floor. This rare book room replaces that vault on the third floor.

This is a view of the exhibition space. There's an interesting combination of windows which are hard to know about because this is all filled up with stacks, and you can hardly see it unless you crawl around over the boxes and all. We think this will be a pretty terrific room.

This is our rendering of the Texas Room after its restoration. Once again, we're doing a new transplant job on the original light fixtures. The original building had cork flooring, and we're putting cork flooring back into the room. This room will have all original historic furniture in it. We're also looking at table lamps here, and the best thing we found so far is a reproduction lamp that is used in the New York Public Library. That may be what we have. We also have computer terminals locations at those reading tables in the Old Texas room (to be named).

Here's the floor 2-1/2. This is high-density shelving over here. I also want to point out we have two separate elevators in our new wing. We have a public elevator that will take you to the second floor and the third floor. Then we have a staff elevator that you only get into from the archival side that goes to all those staff levels, so only staff goes there or you go there accompanied by staff people. That's a big improvement over what we have right now.

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On this floor, these will be library staff offices over on the auditorium wing, and here's something that's dear to my heart; we wanted this to be a really special lounge for volunteers. I know those of you at The Heritage Society would appreciate that very much if you had very special facilities for you when you come to work. We want volunteering in the library to be fun and real comfortable and real desirable and enviable. The clubhouse here for volunteers is We think also about researchers that come on a regular basis. They might be allowed to go in too.

This is the third floor. This is the high-density shelving down here. This is a staff lounge which is there right now. That'll continue to be the staff lounge. This is staff area. This is a conference room that will be restored and used generally for conference space. Then a part that is dear to our hearts, the orange section to the right right now is special collections. We are renovating that room for the extensive architectural archives that the HMRC maintains.