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The Wallis Ballpark Project: Complex pastoralism in rural Texas

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Rice University, 1993
RICE UNIVERSITY

THE WALLIS BALLPARK PROJECT:
COMPLEX PASTORALISM IN RURAL TEXAS

By
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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

The Wallis Ballpark Project: Complex Pastoralism in Rural Texas

by

Alexander C. Carroll

Our relationship with the land is defined in the myth of American pastoralism. The founding and development of rural communities and towns throughout America has been strongly affected by the pastoral ideal. Complex pastoralism as defined by Leo Marx highlights the conflict between progress and this pastoral myth. This thesis is a proposal for the situating of a little league baseball/softball field along the commercial strip of a rural town in Texas. Using the exploration of complex pastoralism in this context, I am developing a strategy for the "architect" to operate in the context of rural America.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the many people who assisted me in my research. I would especially like to thank David Lever who read many of my early manuscripts and contributed his insights. The research of each of the three towns could not have been complete without the helpful information and discussion I shared with the citizens of each town: in Hempstead, Barbara Uzzell, in Wallis, John Lockwood, Barbara Grigar and John Savel, and in West Columbia, Albia Jones, Peggy Mungerson and Emma Womack. I would like to thank my readers: Bill Sherman and Gordon Wittenberg. Finally, I would like to thank the two individuals who without their enthusiasm and support, I do not think that I would have finished, Mark Wamble, my thesis director, and Diane, my wife.
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I. INTRODUCTION

As Americans, our relationship with the land is defined in terms of the myth of American pastoralism. The pastoral ideal has its origins in the settlement of the New World. Since the conception and founding of America, pastoralism has been the ideal that has enabled us to understand our land and to legitimize our actions in relation to it. Pastoralism in essence is looking at the cultivation of the land as morally just and good. That is to say, the land holds a higher value. It is to be used as a source of hope and survival, but it is not to be mutilated.

The founding and development of rural communities throughout America have been strongly affected by the pastoral ideal. The manifestation of these ideals can be seen in the portrayal of these towns in art and literature. Nevertheless, the conflict between the ideal of the "garden," and the subsequent intervention of the "machine" is what has shaped these communities. This introduction establishes the framework of complex pastoralism to direct an analysis of the context of small towns in Texas.

Leo Marx in his book *The Machine in the Garden* proposes two types of pastoralism. The first, sentimental pastoralism, embraces the simple, moral truths that one associates with the land. At its most basic, it is the belief of America as the image of paradise, the Garden of Eden. Sentimental pastoralism is difficult to define because it is a feeling or emotional desire for "nature," and in many ways, the definition of sentimental has become lost in its metaphors.

Marx cites contemporary historians and cultural critics for their belief that the "rural myth" has been a "impediment to clarity of thought" which masks the reality of living in an industrial urban culture (Marx 7). An aspect of its reality is
ignorance or even fear, of the city, technology and industry. His conclusions suggest another reading of pastoralism:

If this more popular kind of pastoralism were the only kind evident in America today, we should have every reason to conclude that it is merely another of our many vehicles to escape from reality - one of those collective mental activities which can be taken seriously only for diagnostic purposes (Marx 10).

Marx's second characterization of pastoralism is complex pastoralism, on the other hand, which is an exploration of the conflict between contemporary industry (the machine) and the "good and moral" rural landscape (the garden). Complex pastoralism approaches an understanding of the complex reality of the dynamics of contemporary life. Leo Marx cites an obscure writing exercise by Nathaniel Hawthorne as a synoptic literary example of complex pastoralism. Hawthorne was "trying to tap the subterranean flow of thought and feeling and then, suddenly, the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forcing him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream (Marx 15)." Hawthorne is aware that the train, which blasts through his wilderness, is a necessity of contemporary life. For Hawthorne, as with much of America, there is an intense feeling towards the landscape. The train represents the progress of the industrial age and its impact on this country. On the surface Hawthorne and Marx have set up an obvious didactic relationship of good verses evil, and the acceptance of evil at some point as means to achieve good. Yet beyond that, we are confronting our relationship with the land, the simultaneous reality of the beloved "garden" (the New World) and the "machine" (the reality of progressive expansion).

Marx ascribes the garden with two different definitions. The European definition equates the New World with the garden of Eden. He describes it as "a landscape untouched by history - nature unmixed with art. The new continent
looked, or so they thought, the way the world might have been supposed to look before the beginning of civilization (Marx 36).’ America was seen as a manifestation of several ideals. To some, it was the primitive origins of the world. To others, it was “chosen land, and that the millennium was at hand (Novak 7).” This definition characterizes the land as an ideal and not a reality. It took the minds of the American enlightenment to make the "garden" a reality.

On the other hand, the American definition of the "garden" is found in Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Virginia. The "garden" was not a myth to Jefferson. He defines it in the concrete terms of the landscape of the State of Virginia as compared to the European image of Paradise or primitive wilderness (Marx 118-9). The "garden" was a plastic definition of the "middle landscape" of America. In the American definition, the pastoral ideal is no longer a myth or utopian ideal, but it is a reality used to define a social and an economic policy (see Marx 141-144).

Contradicting the "garden" is the "machine." The "machine" stands for industrial expansion and progress. Jefferson’s complaint of industrialization was based on his experiences in England. There, the "machine" had subjugated the working class, making farmers into dwellers of urban slums. Because this image and the magnitude of the Jeffersonian image of America, the "machine" has used the rhetoric of the pastoral ideal.

In this sentimental guise the pastoral ideal remained in service long after the machine’s appearance in the landscape. It enabled the nation to continue to define its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power (Marx 226).

Through this conflict, the "machine" in the "garden," the limits of the pastoral ideal are explored by Henry David Thoreau in his tale of Walden. At
Walden Pond, Thoreau occupies the place of the enlightened individual. He lives neither in the town of Concord nor in the wilderness that the reader is led to believe exists beyond the town limits.

In the first chapter "Economy," Thoreau establishes the basis of his criticism for contemporary society. He accuses the town of Concord (and the entire culture) of blind faith and dependence on machines, tools and gadgetry.

He locates it, above all, in their economy - a system within which they work endlessly, not to reach a goal of their own choosing but to satisfy the demands of the market mechanism. The moral, in short is that here 'men have become the tools of their tools' (Marx 247).

While the machines control the lives of the citizens of Concord, the train that passes by Walden Pond is seen as an ambiguous apparition. For the town, it is as another market mechanism connecting Concord to Boston and the world market. However, for Thoreau, it is a symbol of progress and change, leaving the pastoral ideal to the ashes of history. He writes, "we have constructed a fate, an Atropos, that never turns aside." (Let that be the name of your engine.) (Thoreau 98)." He has set the limits of literary pastoralism with the history of the nineteenth century. Yet, he has not excluded pastoralism all together. He has placed it in the narrow confines of his literary experiment.

To extend these defined terms of pastoralism to Texas, one must look at the Southern tradition in town making. Southern rural towns have a distinctive character about them. In the forms of the buildings, streets, roads and spaces, one can easily identify the American town. The southern town is a recent addition to the southern landscape. Prior to the early-nineteenth century, the southern landscape consisted of large, self sufficient plantations and small homesteads. The land was seen as a commodity. In colonial days, it was not
common practice to clear the land of trees and other obstacles to agriculture. Instead, the trees were girdled and cash crops such as tobacco, sugar or cotton were planted around the dying trees. When land played out from over-cultivation, it was abandoned, and the settlers moved further west. The only towns that existed were port towns along the coast and centers of state government. The only other places civic in nature were county courthouses when court was in session and general stores at crossroads to serve the small homesteads (Common 70-77).

As the settlers moved west, access to market ports became difficult, and the southern town was created. Generally, the town was a political, social and commercial venture. These towns were founded in an ordered and repetitious manner. The streets were laid out in a grid with the north-south streets numbered and the east-west streets named after prominent citizens of the town, area and state. Along with the streets, there was a focal point to the town; a courthouse, school and/or park generally served this purpose (Common 260) (fig. 1).

In Texas, many of these towns were founded as commercial ventures. The railroad played a key role in the development of Texan agricultural communities. Roads were expensive to build and maintain in a prairie frequently flooded by numerous creeks, bayous and rivers (Common 77). The railroad because of its singularity of path was easier to build and route. Most of rural Texas communities were either founded by the railroad or founded so that the railroad might go through. The railroad was a "machine," and Marx suggest the ambiguous relationship between the railroad and the pastoral ideal. "The railroad is the chosen vehicle for bringing America into its own as a pastoral utopia. That it also means planting Kansas City where the garden was supposed to be does
not often occur to popular rhetoricians (Marx 225)." The popular rhetoric of using the "machine" (progress) to improve upon the wilderness eventually went beyond the Jeffersonian goal of an agrarian society to the point that it was only "a rhetorical formula... and jejune expression of the national preference for having it both ways (Marx 226)." The contradiction which has been termed complex pastoralism eluded the founders of towns.

Figure 1. Plainview, Texas. An example of settlement patterns in Texas.

In the later half of the twentieth century, these towns have experienced striking transformations through the advances of contemporary transportation (i.e., the railroad, the highway, the bypass and the interstate system) and the subsequent commercial developments. These elements have all successively left their mark upon the form of the town and its internal relationships. Today, for many of these towns, the main street is a state highway providing "illusion of traffic and encouraging a certain amount of drive-in business, but usually these are towns you drive through at 45 MPH. You scarcely notice them, they interrupt so briefly the experience of empty sunlit space (Vernacular 78)."
What the automobile has left the rural town is the "strip development." These areas provide a necessary service to the area. It is along these strips that the machines of industrial culture are sold, cared for and used. Beyond this narrow economic necessity for the strip, there is an important social need for this area. This area is where the people of the town interact in the public realm. The strip is where the youth of the town spend their recreation time (Vernacular 80).

A key component of these spaces is the parking lot. It is here that people begin to interact with one another. The observed scenario of these spaces is the neighbors talking, teens hanging out and the elderly reminiscing. The open space along the strip is where the realization of the contemporary definition of complex pastoralism occurs. Kenneth Jackson in his book on suburbia, The Crabgrass Frontier, notices the contradiction created by the automobile in the actions of one of its greatest salesmen.

A study in contradiction, (Henry) Ford was a salesman whose product destroyed vast areas of traditional small-town life, and who, at the same time, devoted a considerable amount of his fortune and spiritual energies in rebuilding models of old-fashioned villages and promoting old-fashioned square dancing (Crabgrass 161).

The open ground of the parking lot is a place of realization of the transformation of rural towns. It is a place of congestion; congestion of actions, congestion of adjacencies and a congestion of rural culture.

As a means of illustrating these changes, I will look at the towns of Wallis in Austin County, Texas, West Columbia in Brazoria County, Texas and Hempstead in Waller County, Texas. Through its history, the transformation of the area from a farmer and his family to a town is evident. Beyond this
documentation of the transformation, a model for complex pastoralism in Southeast Texas will emerge.
Figure 2. Wallis, Austin County, Texas. Maps and data.
II. a. WALLIS, AUSTIN COUNTY, TEXAS\(^1\)

Wallis, Texas, population 1001, is located about a one hour's drive west of Houston at the intersections of State Highway 36 (Commerce Street), State Highway 60, and Farm Road 1093. The Geographic location of the town is between Brazos River and San Bernard River, drained by Elm Slough to the south and Allen's Creek to the north. Southern tip of Austin County (fig. 2).

Though the town of Wallis was not founded until 1880, the site of the town consist of land granted to the some of Stephen F. Austin's original "300" colonist. At the time of the Texas Revolution, the site was called "Twelve Mile Point" because of the bend in the Brazos River that was approximately twelve miles down river from Stephen F. Austin's colonial capitol San Felipe de Austin. Of the original owners who were granted land, only Stephen Richardson was known to have settled and farmed the site with his family.

In 1859, William Guyler moved to the Wallis area buying the Richardson land grant of approximately 30,000 acres near the Brazos River. By this time, the area had become a popular herding site for cattle because of its natural borders and terrain, and it acquired the name of "Bovine Bend." Guyler was the moving force for developing a community at this site. He built the first steam mill in the area and in 1875 donated 150 acres of land for the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad (today the Atchinson, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad) on which to lay out the town of Wallis.

The town of Wallis was formally established in 1880 at its present site with the Santa Fe Railroad running down the center of the town (fig. 3). Wallis was a watering stop for the railroad's Fort Worth - Richmond - Galveston line. By 1887, the Texas & New Orleans Railroad (today part of the Southern Pacific Railroad
system) built its Houston - San Antonio line just north of the original town. The town was named after Joseph Edmund Wallis(1835-1907), a prominent Galveston merchant and a member of the Santa Fe Railroad board of directors.

Figure 3. State Highway 36(Commerce Street) looking south along Sante Fe Railroad tracks, Wallis, TX.

By 1895, Wallis was considered to be quite a successful town with a population of 400 and five general stores, three grocery stores, two saloons, a lumberyard, a barber shop, a school, two blacksmiths, three hotels, one grist mill and two railroad stations. The open prairie surrounding the town was even praised for its fertility by R. W. Guyler of Bellville. "The soil being three to eight feet deep of hogwaller" was able to produce three quarters a bale of cotton per acre or forty bushels of corn per acre and the cost of one acre of unimproved land was ten to fifteen dollars.
In 1890, several Czech-Moravian families settled in the area. They were often referred to as "clodbusters" for their growing of cotton (a major cash crop of the area and for the state up to the Great Depression). The Czech community set aside four acres of land for a church, school and cemetery. The church and a parochial school are now on this original site. The church of the Guardian Angel that now stands on the site is the third church to be built. The earlier churches were destroyed by an overflow and a cyclone.

The present church was put on the national register of historic landmarks in 1983. It is excellent example of eastern European vernacular architecture transformed by the Texan landscape. The church now serves as a place of worship for 400 families from Wallis, the surrounding towns of Orchard, Simonton, Frydek and Eagle Lake. There has been a lot of tension between the parish and the Archdiocese of Galveston and Houston in the past. When the second church was destroyed in 1900, and the third church built in 1902, the archdiocese was not prompt in appointing a new Czech priest for the parish. To this day, the parishioners do not speak highly of the Archdiocese of Galveston and Houston.

By 1955, the population of Wallis was 690 people and there were 27 businesses. All of the older businesses were in rebuilt facilities because the original structures as with much of the town were destroyed in the great storms of the early 1900's. All of the businesses were small family businesses oriented towards serving the town and the surrounding country. Wallis reached its zenith in the early 1960's. Much of Commerce Street and Railroad Street (main commercial streets) was fully occupied with business.
Many of the businesses were family owned and run. The ownership was passed on from generation to generation. By the second half of 1970's, many of these businesses were losing business to large, chain stores in Sealy and Richmond/Rosenberg. By the time of the oil slump, 1983, these businesses were almost all gone because of lack of customers and family members who wanted to continue with running the locally oriented businesses.

Wallis eventually incorporated in 1972 creating the City of Wallis consisting of 798.5 acres. The new corporate body has a city council of five members and a mayor. In the late 1970's, the chamber of commerce set a bucolic image of the town of Wallis in its promotional literature when it said, "This peaceful little town of churchgoing, industrious and law abiding citizens is an ideal spot for small industry or for the homes of families who desire more open space and breathing room away from the hustle, bustle and noise of the city where it is possible to relax and rest after the labors of the day."

Though the town is in decline, economically, the people of Wallis desire to be portrayed by the image of the pastoral ideal. The great contradiction that coincided with the chamber of commerce literature was the intention by Houston Lighting and Power to build a nuclear power plant north of town along Allen's Creek. The community and city council heavily lobbied for this development. The above chamber of commerce literature was part of this effort. The apparent contradiction of the "machine" in the "garden" is self-evident. Though as Houston Lighting and Power argued to both the state and surrounding counties, this project was to be low impact for both the area and the roads. In the end, Houston Lighting and Power built the plant near Bay City for political reasons.²
About five years ago, John Savel and Cal Shluter renovated an old drugstore and started S & S Outpost Antique Store. A large part of their work is restoration of antique furniture and buildings. Since their store opened, many of the buildings along Commerce Street have been reopened as antique stores, country craft stores and furniture upholsters and finishers. The town seems to be quite glad to have these stores here but much of the furniture and antiques are trucked in from all over Texas. Today, the main commodity is the past.

Figure 4. S & S Outpost Antique Store (old pharmacy and bakery) at Commerce Street and First Street, Wallis, TX.

The business district shows signs of a better time. It is bounded on the north by an Exxon station and the City Meat Market and on the south by the new Texaco Station (an older Texaco Station is two blocks north). Many of the structures show signs of their original use: on one store window the insignia of the drug store is still readable; on the side of brick buildings are painted
advertisements for soft drinks (some of which have been redone); a tiled entry way to the bakery(fig. 4). Interspersed among these existing structures are new prefabricated buildings. These buildings are being used for non-traditional, automobile related services, such as the wash n’ play(video arcade and laundromat), quickmart, auto garage and new pharmacy(fig. 5).

The people of Wallis are skeptical of outsiders. There is a strong resentment and envy. The town has a feeling that someone owes them something, something like a big federal or state project. They want something to pay them back for all of their suffering and sacrifice. There does not seem to be a pride of place. In the other towns that I have visited, there is not such a drastic attrition of the youth of the community who will probably never return to Wallis. Wallis is also divided over change. There is a large portion of the community that desires change on the basis that someone owes them. They seem to be naively ignorant of the means and effects of change.
Figure 5. Health Mart (prefabricated building) at Legion Street and Commerce Street, Wallis, TX.
Figure 6. West Columbia, Brazoria County, Texas. Maps and data
II.  b. WEST COLUMBIA, BRAZORIA COUNTY, TEXAS

West Columbia was part of Columbia, one of the original towns in Stephen F. Austin's colony. Only 45 miles from Houston, it is in the heart of Brazoria County. As of the 1990 census, it has a population of 4372 people (fig. 6).

West Columbia is on land that was part of the original land grant to Josiah H. Bell. Josiah Bell and his family were part of the original Stephen F. Austin colony. Because he was the head of a family, Bell was granted one league and one labor. Bell first settled the site in January of 1824 on Bell Creek. By the fall of 1824, Bell established a landing on the Brazos River just south of Varner Creek and built a permanent home for his wife Mary and their three sons. This site was known as Bell's Landing. By 1826, enough commerce was going through the new town that Bell formally surveyed his land and laid out what was to become two towns. The first was East Columbia (referred to earlier as Bell's Landing or Marion, after Bell's wife, up until the 1840's). Bell then extended an avenue two miles long at the end of which he laid out the town of Columbia (present day West Columbia). In the planning of Columbia, Bell reserved a plaza for public space and twenty square blocks of eight lots each for businesses, and along the Avenue (present day Brazos Avenue), he set aside one acre lots for residences (Creighton 31). By 1834, Col. Juan N. Almonte reported the Municipality of Columbia as the second largest municipality of Austin's Colony with a population of 2,100 (Creighton 85).

The main business of this area was the growing of sugar and cotton. Bell's Landing was one of the major inland ports in Texas. And Josiah Bell's neighbor Martin Varner built the one the first sugar mills along Varner Creek, and his partner Israel Waters distilled the first bottle of rum in Texas. By 1852,
Brazoria County produced the largest quantity of hogsheads of sugar in the Sugar Bowl with two local planters producing 330 hogsheads of sugar. But by the late 1850's, sugar production drastically fell because of hurricanes and extremely cold winters (Creighton 205).

The eastern part of Columbia was plagued by river overflows. Each time an overflow occurred the commercial face of East Columbia would literally change. The flood waters of the river would usually take away the siding, doors and windows at the ground floor and any porch or arcade that might be attached. When rebuilding the lower storey, the builders would quite often change the location of windows, doors and interior partitions and expand or decrease the size of the front porch or arcade.

Figure 7. Replica of the first Capital of the Republic of Texas on Fourteenth Street near Brazos Avenue, West Columbia, TX.
In October of 1836, Columbia became a place of significant prominence when the first Congress of the Republic of Texas met there. The reason for meeting in Columbia was because it had a newspaper *The Telegraph and Texas Register* and adequate facilities to house the new government (Creighton 142). It is said that the town "assumed many of the characteristics of a Texas oil-boom village of a century later (Creighton 145)." The original structure that housed the first congress was destroyed in the Galveston hurricane of 1900. Today, it has been rebuilt next to the new library and civic center (fig. 7). On its original site is strip shopping mall that houses a Napa auto-parts store, a pizza joint, an antique store and behind the historic marker is West Columbia Video.

From April 1836 to the early 1900's, Columbia remained a vital inland port trading cotton, sugar and livestock along the Brazos River. It also served as a connection to the surrounding planters and ranchers. In 1901, former governor James S. Hogg purchased the Varner-Hogg Plantation as an investment property and the belief that there was oil underneath the property. In January 1918, Tyndall-Hogg No. 2 came in opening the West Columbia Oil Field (Creighton 333).

West Columbia was transformed from a sleepy town of three stores, a church and a public square into an oil-boom town. There were many poorly constructed shanties and boardwalks built. It is said that The Palace Cafe never closed its doors for three years because of the amount of business coming through town (Creighton 335). The boom period only lasted a short time, from 1918 to 1926, during which time the West Columbia fields produced over sixty two million barrels of oil. There were periods of revival in the late 1930's and early 1940's with improved drilling techniques, but nothing to compare with the boom period (Creighton 338).
Yet with all of this business coming through or occurring around the town, the people of West Columbia have never been open to new comers. It has been recounted that during the boom period a baptist group wanted to settle and build a congregation in West Columbia but no one would sell them land. So, they leased some land from the county at the town limits. The townsfolks threatened violence for anyone building on the site. The baptist eventually hired a gunman who threatened "You fellows do the building and I will do the shooting if necessary.(Creighton 338)"

Since 1941, history has passed by the city of West Columbia for various reasons. From the 1940's to the 1970's, much of Brazoria County and surrounding counties were developed by the expanding chemical industry. For example, Dow Chemical is now in Lake Jackson, and Phillips 66 is in Bay City. The people of West Columbia and the surrounding countryside would neither court such companies nor sell property to the chemical companies. Today, many of the streets of East and West Columbia dead end at pastures and uncultivated fields.

Much of the businesses along the main street are now closed(fig. 8). The town council issues permits for all new businesses within the city limits. For a long time, the council as well as the town did not want businesses run by outsiders. The community of original settlers is still close knit and divides the town into "us" and "them"(anyone who has moved to the town from someplace else). The first business to break this barrier was Jumbo Foods, a supermarket. It is now closed, but it paved the way for other outside investment.

Most of the businesses in town were family owned and run. Many of these have closed, and one can see the evidence of this by the almost vacant
downtown. Most of them closed because the owner died and no one in the family wanted the business. Today, one of the locally owned businesses percentage of local business is a small ten percent most of the regular business comes from surrounding towns and developments (60%). Today, the chamber of commerce has some definite ideas about where the business of West Columbia might develop. They see West Columbia building up its tourism industry in the area with the addition of antique stores and bed and breakfasts.

Figure 8. Capitol Picture Show (closed), older retail district along Brazos Avenue, West Columbia, TX.

It comes to no surprise that the main street is still the "Avenue," State Highway 35 (Brazos Avenue). The intersection of Brazos Avenue and Broad Street is still the historic center of town. It is near here that one finds city hall, volunteer fire company, the junior high, and along Brazos Ave. the now closed Capitol Picture Show. Most of the new construction is occurring at the periphery.
The town recently built a new multi-use complex and a replica of the first capitol between Thirteenth Street and Fourteenth Street half a block off of Brazos Avenue. At the other end of town, HEB Pantry has recently opened a new supermarket at the intersection Brazos Avenue and Seventeenth Street (State Highway 35 and F.M. 1301)(fig. 9).

Figure 9. HEB Pantry (new), example of new development at periphery of town, West Columbia, TX.
Figure 10. Hempstead, Waller County, Texas. Maps and data.
II. c. HEMPSTEAD, WALLER COUNTY, TEXAS

The city of Hempstead was founded in December of 1856 by Dr. Richard R. Peebles and James W. McDade as the Hempstead Town Company. Hempstead is 50 miles from Houston. In the 1990 census, the population was 3551 people (fig. 10).

The site of Hempstead was in the midst of cotton plantations at a cross roads called "Six Shooter Junction" known and feared by drivers of stage coaches in Texas. Cotton and corn being the major cash crops of the area, it was necessary to get the crops to market. Early attempts had been to use the Brazos River, but the river was too shallow for large barges to reach present-day Waller County. The other solution was to haul products by wagon to Houston which was both too slow and difficult because of unimproved roads.

In the 1850's, the Texas state legislature approved the creation of the "Houston & Texas Central Railroad" which was to run a road for commerce from a railhead at the port of Houston to agricultural settlements in central Texas. In 1856, the founding fathers of Hempstead laid out the town offering lots to the H. & C.T. Railroad in the hopes that the railroad would run its line through the town. On 29th and 30th of June and 1st of July, 1858, a celebration was organized to celebrate the arrival of the first train to Hempstead. "Nearly 3000 persons were present. Everyone gathered beneath a large awning made of limbs of trees and bushes. The festivities ended with fireworks in the evening, and a ball at the Planters Exchange, and at Snell's Hotel at night. The gay blades and their ladies danced until the dawn of the following day (Waller 377)."

During the Civil War, Hempstead was surrounded by Confederate Army camps because of its significance as a railroad junction, Camp Carter, Camp
Groce and Camp Herbert. Camp Groce was used as a prison camp for northern soldiers. Camp Groce and Camp Herbert were both located south of town on either side of the railroad tracks. The location of Camp Carter is still unknown. After the war, federal occupation troops were garrisoned at Camp Groce in 1865 under the command of Major General George A. Custer (Waller 379).

After the Civil War, round houses, railroad shops, warehouses and railroad stations were built to service the railroad. The Texas & New Orleans Railroad laid tracks in 1870. The only railroad still running through town is the Southern Pacific on the Texas & New Orleans line.

In 1871, the state legislature approved the incorporation of the town of Hempstead with a city council of a mayor and nine alderman. Because of its new status of city, Hempstead became the county seat for Waller County when it was created by the legislature in 1873. Waller County consist of parts of Austin County, Harris County and Grimes County (Waller 381).

The land around Hempstead is rich and loamy, perfect for growing almost anything. By the turn of the century, Hempstead was the watermelon capitol of the United States. In one year over 1800 railroad car loads of watermelons were shipped from the Hempstead depot (Waller 373). Today, the land is still heavily farmed. The major crops of the area are pecans, grapes and watermelons. The high quality of the soil is as a result of the overflowing of the Brazos River which leaves its silt on the land.

When the town was founded, the town company set aside three blocks of land for public buildings such as the post office, city hall and a public park. The Fireman's Park is the oldest park in town. It was given to the fire brigade to care for in 1899. The wives of the fire brigade and later the Hempstead Garden Club
set out to plant the park with flowers and curb the grazing of animals on it. In 1901, the city passed an ordinance that any animal caught grazing on city property would be assessed the penalty of a fine (Waller 383). The park is now called "Gazebo" Park and contains four stone memorials to all residents of Hempstead who were killed in the past four wars.

On the block adjacent to Fireman's Park was the site of the only WPA project in Hempstead. It was community center which served as a public function space for the town. It is said that Eleanor Roosevelt visited the building on its opening day. It was destroyed to make way for a new post office which opened in 1967. The only function space left near the town is the Hempstead Country Club (Waller 390). In July of 1957, the present day city hall opened to much fanfare. It was novel in its design because it housed both the fire station and the city hall.

The three major dates that everyone in Hempstead keep in their calendar are the county fair, Fourth of July and the Salt Grass Trail ride. All of these are events of great celebration and spectacle. The Waller County Fair and Rodeo is held just outside the city limits of Hempstead. But, it started by a grand parade through the streets of Hempstead to the fair grounds. The Fourth of July is again celebration for a parade and a town barbecue that used to be held at the old depot but is now held in Fireman's Park. The Salt Grass Trail ride originates in Brenham and passes through Hempstead gather riders and wagons on its way to Houston for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

The town still has much of its original character except many of the buildings around city hall (the old commercial center of town) seem to be run down and lacking vitality though they are almost all occupied (fig. 11). The new
vitality in Hempstead is along Austin Street before Twelfth Street. It is along here that all the traffic going to and from Houston, Austin or College Station passes. The gateway of Hempstead coming from the south is designated by the Walmart and Marshal Ford/Mercury(fig. 12). Along this road, there is almost every imaginable convenience store, gas station, fast food joint and pass-by knick/knak store(fig. 13). Across from the Waller County Courthouse where one might imagine large homes or county office buildings, there is Marshal GM/Chevrolet and Marshal Chrysler/Dodge.

Figure 11. The older retail district off of Austin Street, Hempstead, TX.

In the town of Hempstead and the land, property is now at a premium. Many people from Houston are retiring or just moving to the area bring more tax dollars and business to the area. Also many of the "nouveau riche" are settling in the area and trying their hand at ranching. The town seems to be very positive to
this influx of new comers. And within five to ten years, many of the new comers feel like life long residents.

Figure 12. Walmart sign at the city line on US 290(Austin Street), Hempstead, TX.

Figure 13. Austin Street(US 290), Hempstead, TX.
III. THE PROJECT

Each of the three towns, Wallis, West Columbia and Hempstead, are different in character. Each town had its boom years, and each town had its years of decay. In choosing these three towns, I wanted to look through the differences to some instances of commonality. What I discovered, instead, was that these towns exist because of their differences. And the insertion of an architectural project should be aware of the uniqueness of each circumstance and reflect upon it.

To have a point of focus, I chose a site in Wallis, Texas (fig. 14). The town of Wallis as discussed above is the smallest of the three towns and seems to be in a period of decay while the consensus of the town is searching for a new identity. All of these three towns have large areas of undeveloped voids scattered in and around the town. I chose the site in Wallis because of the adjacencies to the void.

The site is two city blocks. It is delineated by State Highway 36 (Commerce Street) to the north, Gresham Street to the south, Third Street to the west and Fifth Street to the east. On the site are several existing structures and conditions. Along Commerce Street between Third Street and Fourth Street, there are commercial structures built out of masonry. Inside of these structures are a light industrial workshop and storage space, antique store and an auto parts store. Along Commerce Street between Fourth Street and Fifth Street, there are newer commercial structures, including a gas station and a prefabricated building with a liquor store, Gary's Quick Stop and a laundromat/video arcade. On the other side of Commerce Street, the Santa Fe Railroad tracks carry about ten trains a day. Behind the site along Gresham
Street, there is a residential section of town with large houses on large lots. Opposite of the site on Third Street is the civic center of Wallis, the city hall, the police station and the emblematic water tower. The void of the site is ground upon which to reflect upon and become aware of the odd adjacencies that define Wallis and other towns like it.

The analysis of the site is in two parts. The first part is a study of the characteristics of the town through the elements that define the undeveloped voids. The three elements are poles, signs and the ground. These elements provide partial spatial resolution by the combination of the three. The poles are something that have not changed since the 1960's. Their character is dictated by economics and the conventions of highway departments, telephone companies and electric companies. The poles are soaked in creosote for weather protection, and various fixtures are attached as necessity demands. The poles are then connected to one another by a wires that transfer electricity or telephone conversations(fig. 15).

The signs of the town add another dimension to the voids. They add color and walls. They are also part of the symbolic language used to sell. The signs of Wallis vary greatly; each sign in Wallis seems to have its place in history. Some signs are billboards painted on the sides of buildings, faded but still conveying its message of the past. Other signs show the great care that went into manufacturing them such as the old enamel Texaco sign. The signs of today, also, have a character of their own. These signs show the act of mass production and the limit of the lifetime of the sign. The signs are made out of pressed plastic that has been painted. These signs are lit with internal fluorescent fixtures(fig. 16).
Figure 14. Copy of original town plat for Wallis, TX and site photographs.
The last element is the ground. The ground is one of the often overlooked elements, but it is very important because the nature of the ground dictates its use. A hard surface such as asphalt is for driving on or parking. A softer surface such as gravel or packed earth is for walking on or the occasional driving. A soft surface such as grass is for recreation and relaxation. Finally, the stablest surface such as concrete is for building upon(fig. 17).

The other part of the analysis is the study of the undeveloped voids in the town and their relationship to the commercial strip (the external facade of the town). The existing fabric of the town of Wallis is the scattering of buildings across a grid laid out in the Texas prairie. There is a concentration of buildings along a segment of Commerce Street. Interspersed among these buildings are the voids. Some of these voids are developed in the forms of parking lots, yards and cultivated fields. The remainder are figural blanks in the form of the town(fig. 18).

The program for the project evolved out of the analysis of the three towns and the above study. The program is for the placement of a little league baseball/softball field, bleachers and accompanying support facilities and parking. The program is seen as a tool for bringing a marginalised space to the center of town and activating the void. The activity to occur in the void is not to be regular but episodic and haptic(fig.19 and 20).

As the site is divided into two blocks, the program was divided into two elements: the field and the parking lot. The limits and restrictions upon the field are determined by the rules that regulate the game(fig. 22). The bleachers, however, are placed as a bar along Commerce Street with the existing commercial space broken down into pieces and inserted underneath the
bleachers. The new commercial structures are to become an integral part of the bleachers. It is integrated by the fact that the existing commercial structures now not only serve the town but also the game. The buildings become part of the vertical circulation. In order to get to the bleachers people have to walk up to the roofs of the buildings before entering the bleachers(fig 21 and 23).

The parking lot is characterized by a sloped surface. This allows a transition between the commercial strip and the residential neighborhood behind it. The focus of the parking lot is a renovated dance hall(honky-tonk). The dance hall's interior spaces take on a similar attitude as the commercial structures that are inserted underneath the bleachers. They are boxes that house all of the supporting spaces to the dance hall. The renovation of the dance hall occurs in its interaction with the adjacent spaces. For example, there is an overhung door placed on the parking lot elevation of the dance hall. Coincidentally, the stage for the dance hall is located here. Thus, the stage allows performances by local musicians to be enjoyed both from within the dance hall as well as from the parking lot. To the south of the dance hall is an open yard. This yard is the residential elevation of the dance hall. It is an outdoor space where people can congregate away from the noise of the band(fig. 24).

The poles that were examined above aid in this distinction between the spaces and the adjacent residential and commercial areas. The light poles define the open area of the softball field and limited area of the parking lot. The electric line weaves its way across the site drawing the limits of the commercial realm and the residential realm(fig. 19, 20 and 25).

The attitude of the design is a low-key approach that looks at the context of the town and the elements that define the undeveloped voids. The role of the
"architect" is not to come in and overwhelm the town and site with bombastic forms. It is, instead, to actively engage the site and the program. Ultimately, I have created a benign architecture.
Figure 15. Poles.
Figure 16. Signs.
Figure 17.  Ground.
Figure 18. Diagrams of figure/ground, undeveloped land and public space.
Figure 19. Site plan.
Figure 20. Photographs of site model.
Figure 21. Photographs of section model.
APPENDIX JURY COMMENTS

The oral defense was on 23 April, 1993 at five o'clock PM. The jury consisted of Mark Wamble, thesis director, Gordon Wittenberg, reader, William Sherman, reader, Michael Bell, guest critic, and Richard Ingersoll, guest critic. The program was critically engaged by the reviewers and the following points directed the discussion.

GROWTH The discussion concerned how this system and its attitude would accommodate growth. This project is more of a shoring up of existing circumstances which anticipate growth. When growth occurs in Wallis, this project might experience radical transformations. However, it is important to note that what I am acting upon is not the sentimental or nostalgic characteristics, but rather the existing conditions of Wallis. This approach hopefully allows for a critical reappraisal for the future.

POLICY The reviewers speculated that this program may be beyond the realm of architecture in that public policy underlies many of its aspects. This project suggests the need to incorporate and to effect policy. The juxtapositions of its many zones and adjacencies challenge the biases of government and the private sector. In this manner, the jury embraced the sincerity of this revised role of the architect.

SCALE The question concerned the viability of this project on a larger scale. The group's consensus was that it would not work on a large site (e.g. fifty continuous blocks) because it would revert to simulation. That is to say, it would simply be quoting the nostalgia that it is trying to escape. On the other hand, in a large scale enclave or sub-division where there is a scattering of
vacant lots and gaps the project could succeed. In this situation, the focus would be upon the context and the catalog of existing elements.

TIME The jury completed their review by acknowledging a timelessness of the project. It was determined that the overall appearance of the project was not tied to any specific time period. An exploration of the Tectonics of the pieces and of the buildings was seen as a possible solution. The focus of this exploration would be on the quality of the temporary and of the permanent and also of the determination of what is temporary and what is permanent.
NOTES

1 The local newspaper, The Wallis News-Review, ran a series of articles on the history of the town in the summer of 1980 in honor of the one hundredth anniversary if the town's founding. The following history is from these articles. They are available at the Robert Wallis Knox, Jr. Library in Wallis, Texas.

2 Information dating after 1980 is from personal interviews with John Lockwood, the mayor, Barbara Grigar, the city clerk, library staff, John Savel and other local merchants.
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