

## **Howling on Dowling**

(Music playing)

Roger Wood: Conrad Johnson was born in 1915 in Victoria, Texas.

RW: In 1947, Conrad had several singles on the Gold Star label.

RW: None of them really did much beyond local popularity and local jukeboxes, but his most famous hit certainly locally was a 1947 song called “Howling on Dowling,” and Dowling, D-o-w-l-i-n-g, is the name of the main street through Third Ward.

(Music playing)

RW: But since the end of World War II, or since the 1940s and then particularly accelerated after World War II, Third Ward became predominantly African American and it’s one of the more famous and or infamous black neighborhoods in Houston and probably in Texas.

RW: In the 1940s when Houston and Texas were fairly prosperous places after the war and moving on in to the 50s, Third Ward was starting to change.

RW: When it had once been primarily a pedestrian neighborhood where folks got around on cabs and buses, folks began to own cars and peoples lifestyles changed.

RW: But in the 40s before desegregation, Third Ward was one of the main two districts in Houston where not only were the majority of the residents African American, but the majority of the business owners and establishments were.

RW: And along that street, dating as far back as the 20s and 30s, but most prominently in the 40s and early 50s, there were black-owned businesses that included banks, at least two movie theaters, all manner of restaurants, nightclubs ranging from small cafes to grand-scale venues, such as the El Dorado Ballroom was at the corner of Elgin and Dowling.

RW: On down on Dowling you have the club Ebony, which was a major jazz club. Arnett Cobb was one of the main stays there.

(Music playing)

RW: In 1947, Conrad Johnson and his band recorded a song that he wrote and that he sang on. He wasn’t really a singer but he sang on that song, a song called “Howling on Dowling.”

RW: It mentions the El Dorado Ballroom specifically. The song, the main line of the song is a question, “Have you ever been howling on Dowling? Have you ever been

prowling that street? Have you ever been howling on Dowling? My it's a real good street," or something to that effect.

RW: And when they get to the turnaround part before they go back to that main chorus, he's kind of, the singer is delineating some of what you'll find on Dowling, and he says

(Music playing)

RW: The only one he mentions by name is the El Dorado, but these recognizable landmarks that folks would associate with Dowling Street, which where Third Ward was Main Street.

(Music playing)

RW: Peoples lifestyle changed and eventually the neighborhood underwent a great loss of population as folks moved out to the more prestigious suburbs, particularly after desegregation.

RW: But as we go down Dowling you see over to our left here part of a development called Project Row Houses, which has done, in my opinion, an impressive job of preserving elements of Third Ward culture and history as the neighborhood changes rapidly around us.

(Music playing)