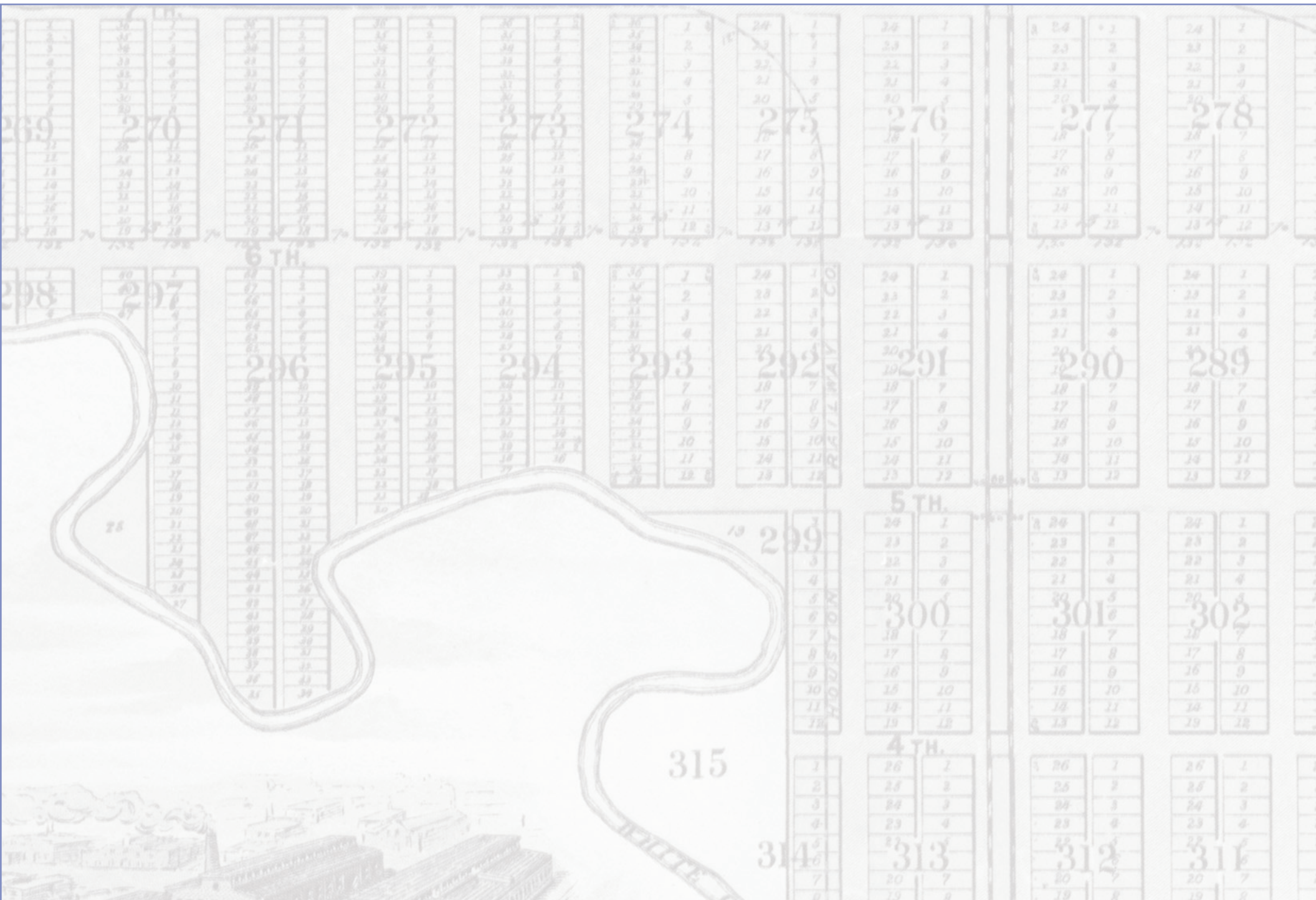
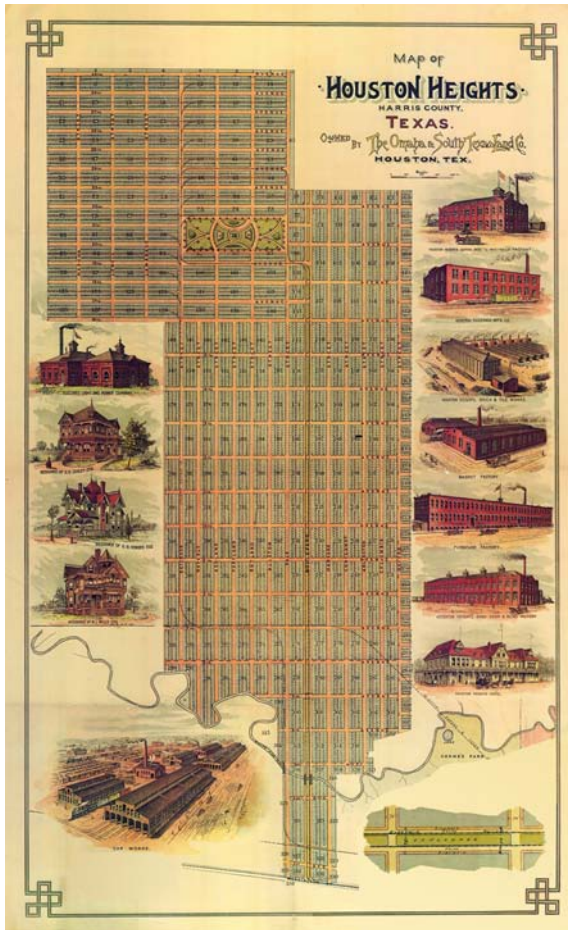


I. Introduction





The Heights
The original 1756
acre tract



Houston Heights 1891-2008

The Realization of a Developer's Dream

Houston Heights was conceived, planned and developed in 1891 on 1756 acres of land by O.M. Carter and his Omaha and South Texas Land Company. Located two and a half miles and 23 feet above downtown Houston, the heavily forested and gently sloping land provided excellent drainage and an attractive site for the first planned mixed-use community in Texas; a town where “successful entrepreneurs and working people alike could live and work in health and safety, as neighbors.”

To provide convenient access the developers bridged White Oak Bayou, purchased Houston's obsolete mule-drawn streetcar systems, electrified them, and extended the lines to their new community. They platted approximately 10,000 lots for sale, including sites for residences, churches, schools, a park, retail and commercial buildings. Their plans also included establishment of a major industrial and manufacturing district served by railroad.

In 1892, public utility systems and streets, including a grand boulevard and esplanade, were constructed. Seventeen magnificent homes were built and marketed for sale on the boulevard. To ensure these homes were of quality construction and the highest development standards possible, Houston's first deed restrictions were enacted along the boulevard. Those early days also included development of a retail center just west of the boulevard as well as a grand hotel to house prospective investors. The new streetcar system provided for efficient and convenient transportation to all these locations.



The neighborhood grew rapidly and was incorporated as a city in 1896. The early decades of the 20th century saw the development of a flourishing suburban mixed use community offering thousands of houses for a diverse range of income groups, a fire station and city hall, churches, schools, retail shops, factories, streets and all the necessary public infrastructure. In 1918, Houston Heights residents, in need of a wider tax base to support their public schools, voted to be annexed by the City of Houston.



Revitalization

Due to its convenient location close to downtown, the affordability and uniqueness of its historic buildings and its attractive tree lined streets, the character of the Houston Heights survived. In the early 1970s, residents realized the significance of the area as a historic asset and initiated preservation measures. The Houston Heights Association (HHA), a not-for-profit civic association was founded in 1973. The organization's 1977 amended mission statement references "support for the preservation of historic buildings and places" and a commitment to the small town lifestyle which defined the character of the Heights.

To a large extent the small town character still exists, although Houston Heights has experienced substantial change since the early 1970s. Many historic structures considered to be too small and other buildings in poor condition have been demolished in favor of larger new houses. At the same time, many historic properties have been rehabilitated and remodeled often with substantial additions in square footage. Other signs of revitalization can be seen in the renewed popularity of the retail shops on 19th street, rehabilitation and restoration of area schools and the many neighborhood improvements championed by the HHA, including two new parks, reforestation of the boulevard and restoration of the 1914 city hall/fire station. As the demographics have changed, older residents have been replaced by younger and more affluent families.

Post World War II Decline

Like many residential areas built close to the downtowns of rapidly growing metropolitan areas, Houston Heights experienced major economic and population changes during the twentieth century. The rapid increase in affluence and ownership of the private automobile in the late 1930s and 1940s spurred flight from inner-city neighborhoods to outlying suburban subdivisions. Houston Heights, with its unique historic "small town" qualities prospered prior to World War II. The decades of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were marked by deterioration in the historic housing stock, the division of large and small single-family houses into duplexes and apartments, and the introduction of small new apartment buildings. New houses built in this early post-war period were constructed using designs and materials that were not compatible with the historic character of the neighborhood. The closure of retail shops forced out of business due to a declining customer base provided further evidence of deterioration in the fabric of the neighborhood.



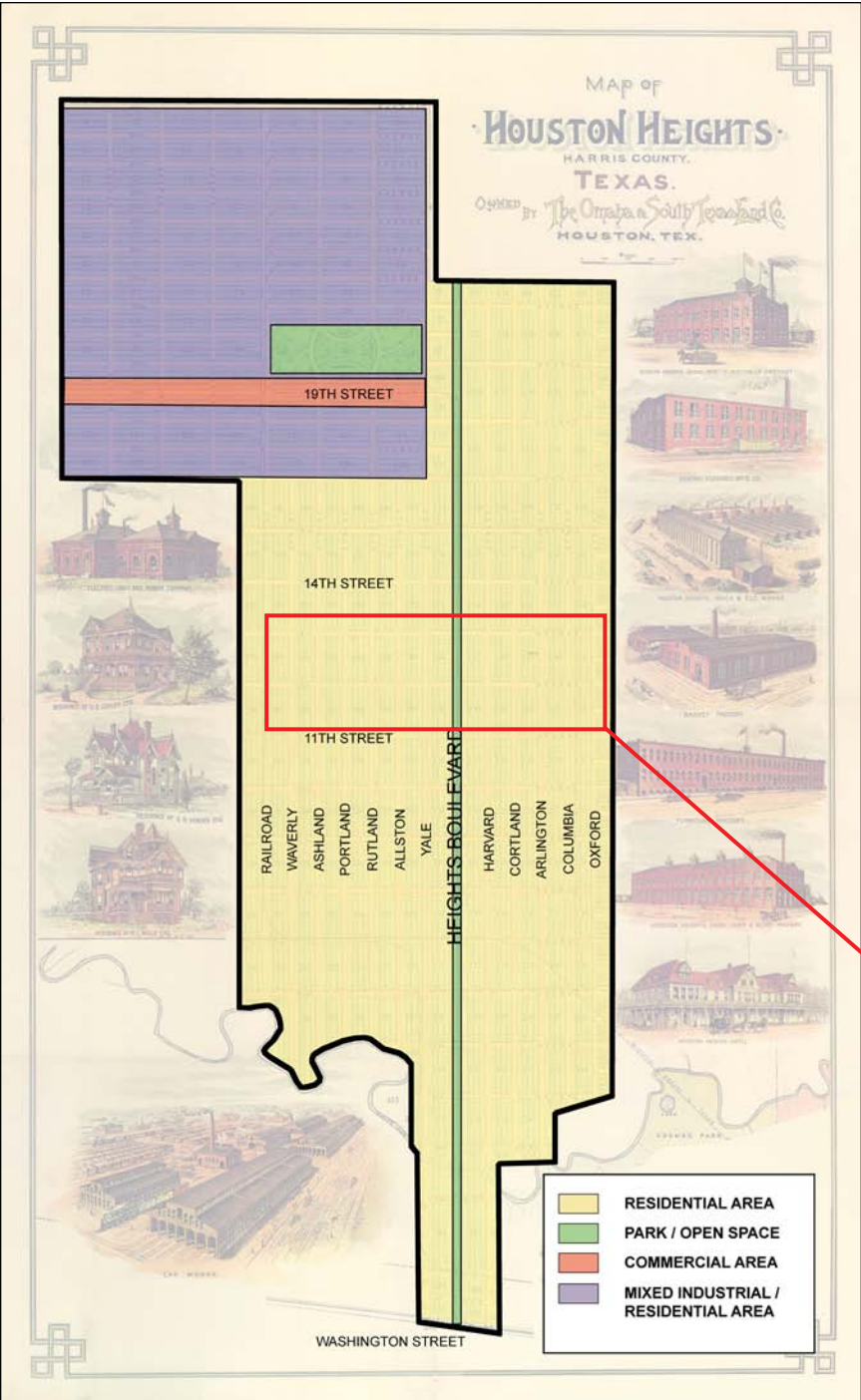


The 21st Century

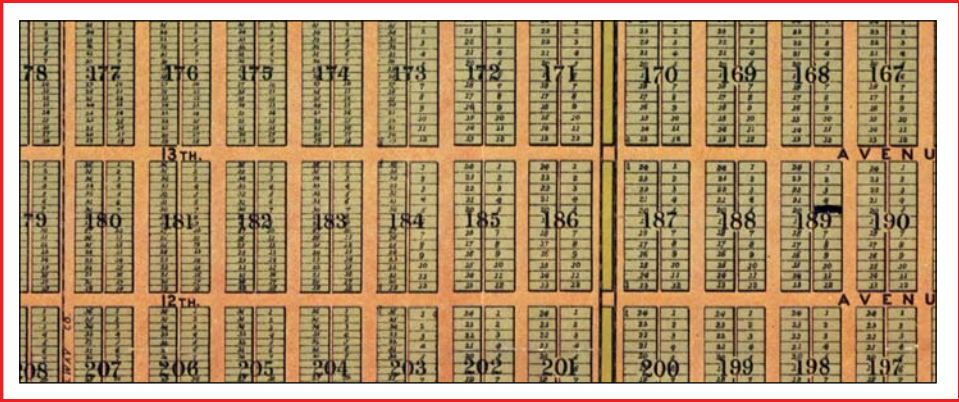
Houston Heights, like many inner-loop neighborhoods, is in transition and its historic small town character is threatened. Between 1994 and August 2008, 24% of the properties in the historic districts that are the residential core of the Houston Heights have been redeveloped. While many of the new houses and additions to existing historic structures are sympathetic to the form and materials that distinguish the original historic structures, the design and particularly the large scale of many of the new houses is not compatible with the neighborhood's historic character. This phenomena and the continuing demolition of historic structures led concerned citizens to press for and succeed in expanding the number of deed restricted properties, establishing lot size and setback protections and petitioning for City of Houston historic district designation.

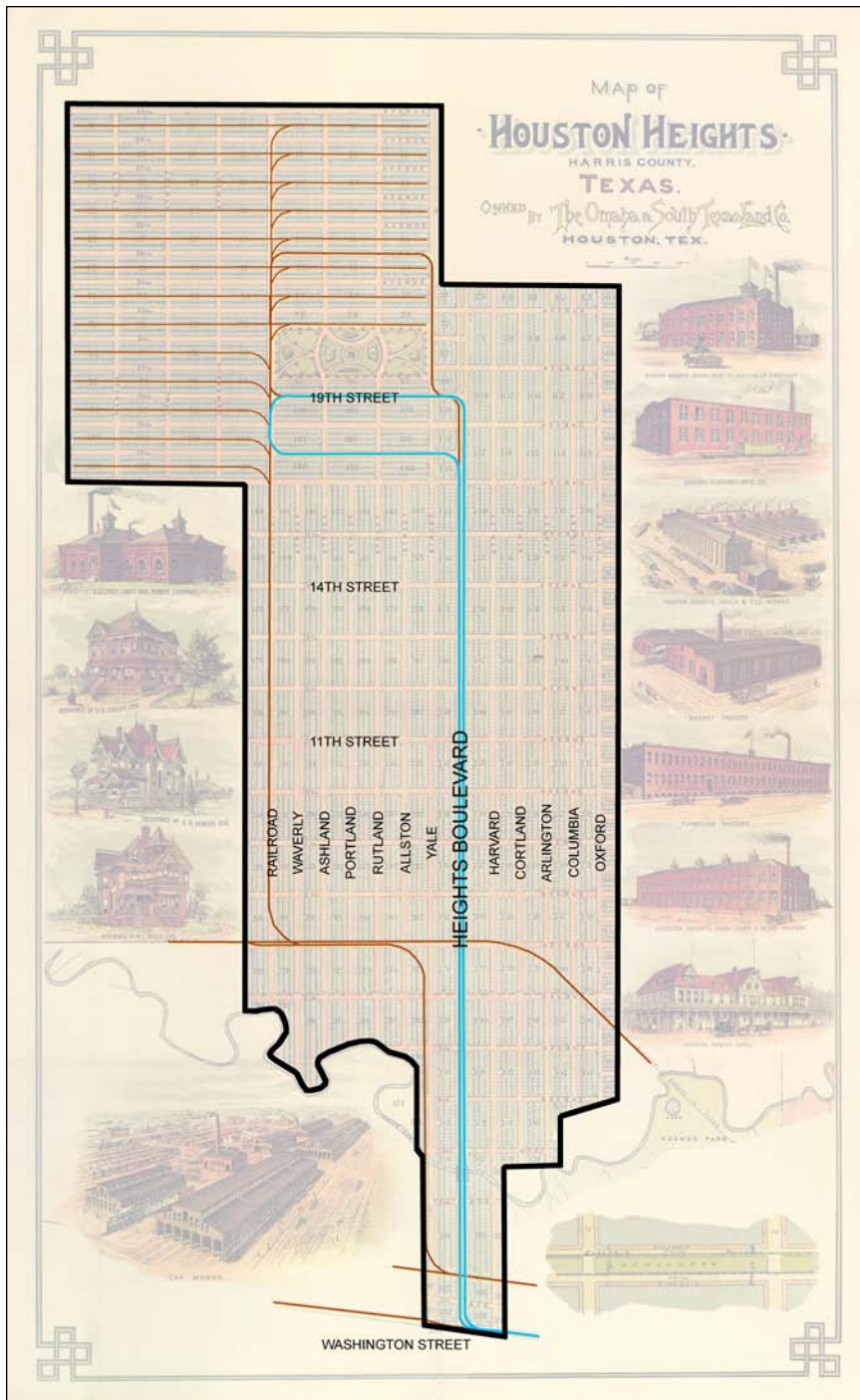
The Planned Structure

The neighborhood's residential pattern was laid out in a rectangular grid of streets with a strong north/south directional emphasis focused on a central spine - Heights Boulevard with its 60 foot wide esplanade inspired by Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. The boulevard and the parallel streets, running north-south, allowed almost all residential buildings to face east/west. This was considered the most desirable orientation for houses to counter Houston's hot humid summers and subtropical climate. A majority of the residential lots had 50 feet wide frontage, with each lot encompassing an area of approximately 6600 square feet. These lots were laid out in 600 foot by 290 foot blocks comprising some 24 houses per block. Corner lots and lots allocated for important houses on or near the boulevard were often larger. Most blocks were bisected by 15 foot wide north/south utility alleys in which power and sewer lines were located. Street lights were located only on the cross streets running east/west.

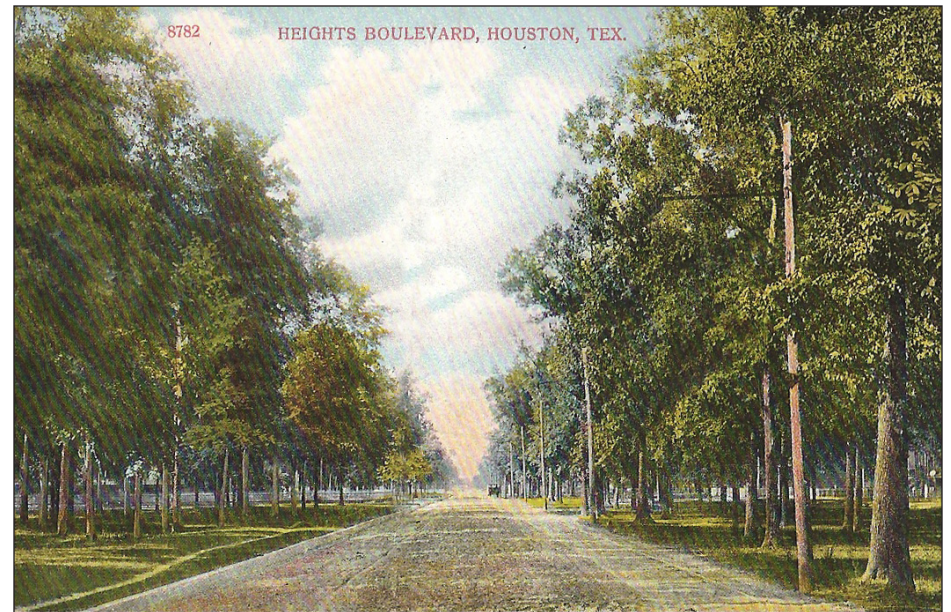


Land Use Diagram





Rail / Streetcar Network



Boulevard Esplanade circa 1902

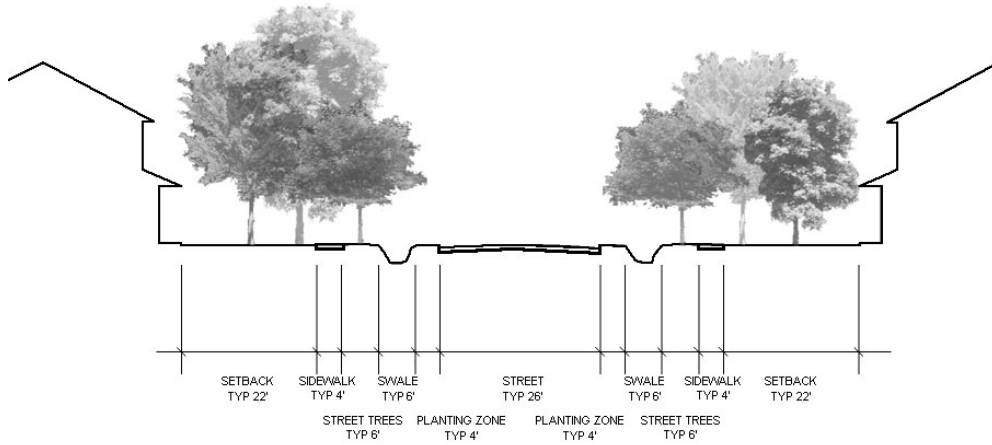
Exceptions to these arrangements were found west of Yale Street and north of 16th Street where the houses had a north/south orientation and were located on smaller lots. Churches and schools were mostly located on larger lots or near the boulevard. The commercial and retail property was located on or near 19th Street. Both the boulevard and the commercial center were served by street car. In the northwest sector of the Heights lay the manufacturing and industrial area where rail spurs linked to national railroads.



Street Photographs

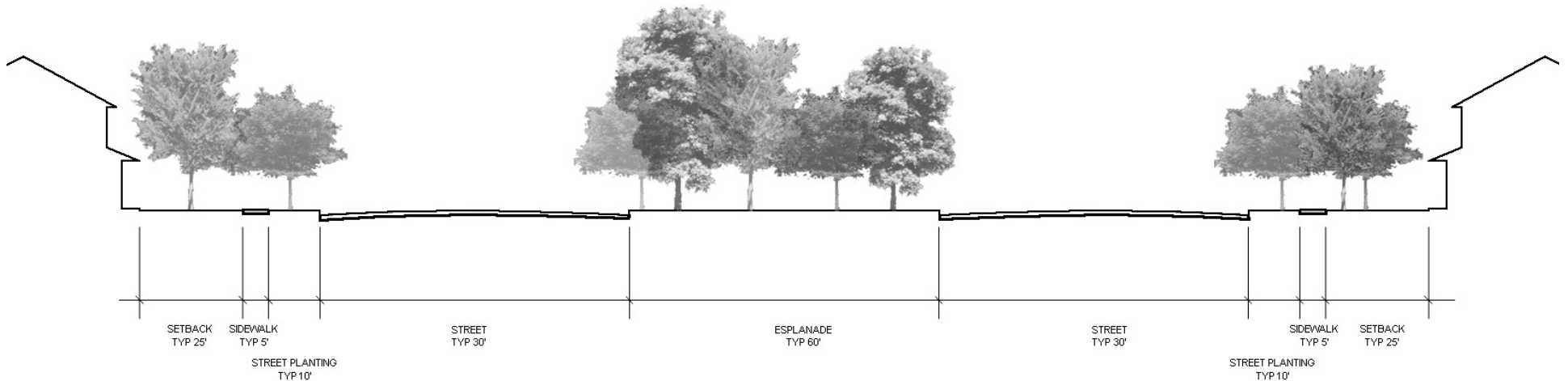
While the indigenous forest was cleared where necessary to construct the boulevard and streets, trees were planted along open drainage ditches and, unusual for that time period and for subsequent residential subdivisions in Houston, sidewalks were built on all streets to provide for convenient, linked and eventually shaded pedestrian access to all residential blocks, schools and churches.

Typical Street Section



Boulevard Esplanade

Typical Boulevard Section





Housing

“for both entrepreneurs and working people”

The developers, to establish a successful community, planned for and encouraged diversity both in lot size and income groups. This was physically reflected by the concentration of large houses for wealthier families on the main spine of the neighborhood, Heights Boulevard, and the parallel streets on either side of the boulevard, Harvard and Yale. It was here that two and three-story turreted Queen Anne, Victorian-era and Colonial Revival mansions and large raised bungalows were built for local dignitaries and the partners in the Omaha and South Texas Land Company between 1894 and 1910.





ibly dominate feature of all the early houses. Substantial overhangs at the eaves provided both shade and protected the walls from Houston's torrential downpours.

Porches with balustrade railings graced the facades. All houses, regardless of size or style, were built with roofed first floor front porches to shade the living quarters and distinguish the main entrances. The porches were often large enough for families to gather and escape the intense humid heat of the summer in the days before air conditioning.

Few houses were designed by local architects. Many of the larger residences were constructed and modified to the owners' tastes from the catalogues of plans of well known mail order architects such as George Barber of De Kalb, Illinois. Other houses, including some on the boulevard, were built using plans available for purchase from Sears and Roebuck Company, Henry Wilson's Bungalow Book or The Craftsman, a Californian publication.

The houses were raised off the ground using pier and beam construction to protect them from intrusion by surface water and to allow air to circulate beneath them. Almost all houses were clad with wood siding and occasionally with decorative shingles. Double hung wood sash windows were the norm and openings in all facades, whether for windows or doors, were subordinate in area to the solid wall surfaces. Roofs were a vis-





Pedestrian and vehicular access to the houses was from the street and not from the alley. This resulted in the houses being separated from each other by side yards. Garages and outbuildings were located to the rear of the lot. “Porte cocheres”, sometimes found as an adjunct to larger houses, were built well back from the front facade of the main building or integrated into the main building on the side elevations.

In addition to lining the sidewalks and streets, live oaks, post and water oaks, pines, pecans and southern magnolia trees provided shade for both front and rear yards. Front yards were usually formally laid out with concrete entrance paths with lawns and flower beds adjacent to the house. While some houses were fenced with picket or iron fences, many of the blocks had no front yard fences separating neighbor from neighbor.





Three years later in 1991, Houston City Council adopted a resolution designating the whole area as the Houston Heights Historic District, recognizing it

“as one of the first planned communities in the State of Texas...the largest intact historic district in the city...tangible evidence of Houston’s architectural and historical legacy and...an area with great potential for enhancement and revitalization as a point of interest in the city.”

Initiatives

to Preserve the Historic Character of the Heights

In 1983, the Heights was designated by the National Park Service as a Multiple Resources Area because, among other assets, it contained a large number of buildings individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (some 141 structures). In 1988, the Houston Heights Urban Main Street project of West 19th Street was established by the Texas Historical Commission and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This initiative led to the successful rehabilitation and revitalization of the Heights’ original retail area and the formation of the Greater Heights Chamber of Commerce.

Neither designation provided any powers, rights or protections with regard to preservation of the area’s historic buildings or places. In 1995, with the passing of the City of Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance (Ord. No.95-228) the basis for designating local historic districts and measures for their preservation became a reality. Today the Heights has some 60 City Landmark buildings and multiple Historic Districts were designated by the Houston City Council.

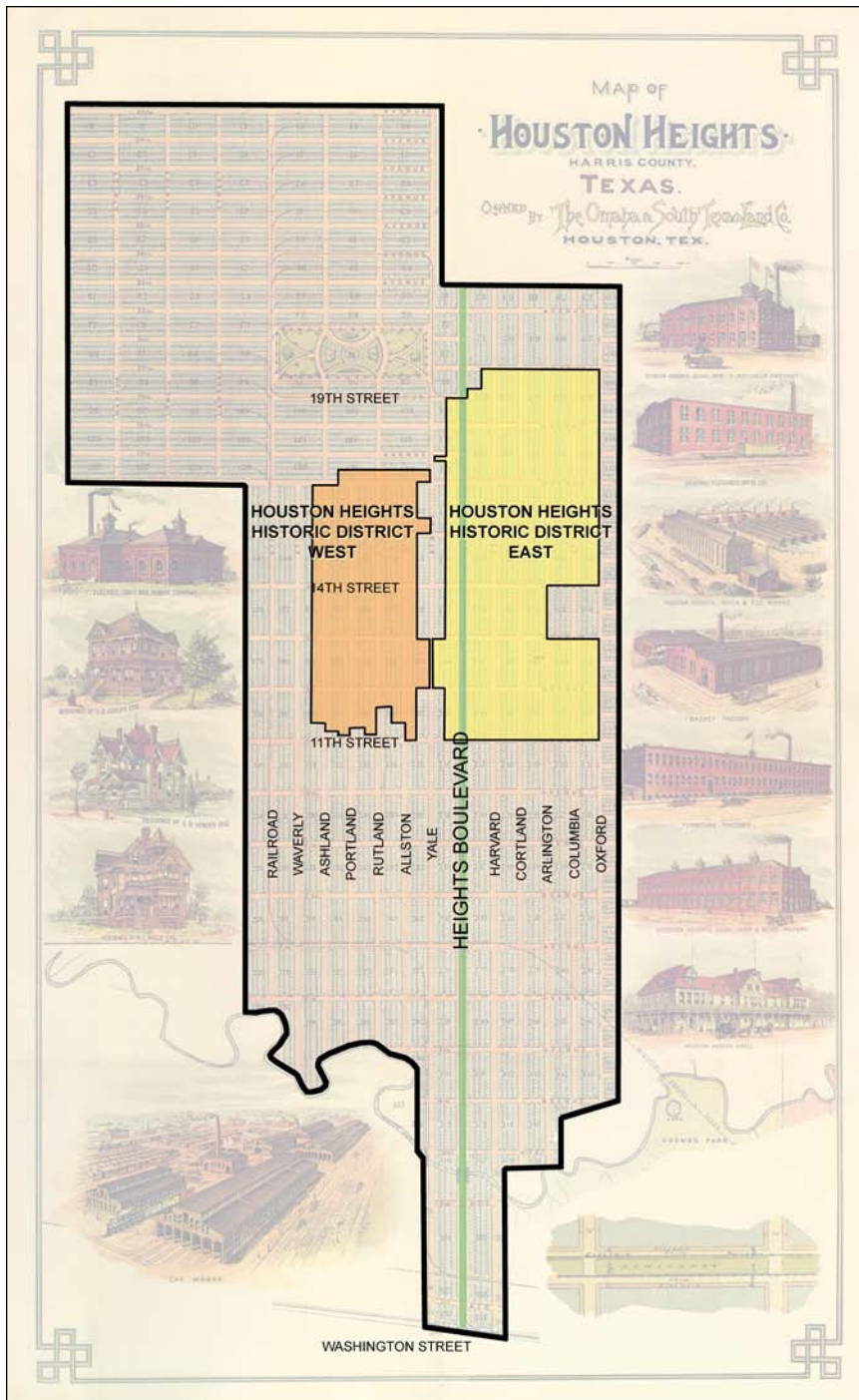


The Heights Historic Districts

The definition of an historic district in the Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance Reads:

“Historic district means a geographical area designated by the City Council that possesses a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of buildings, structures, objects or sites united by historical, cultural, architectural or archeological significance to the city, state, nation or region.”

The Heights Historic Districts, which comprise the majority of historically and architecturally significant residential property in the neighborhood, also contains a unique concentration of historically significant church buildings unequalled in Houston. Some 141 buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places and 60 have been designated as City Landmarks. 1500 properties have been assessed by the city as “contributing” or “potentially contributing” to the historic character of the Heights. The total number of properties in historic districts represent 16% of the approximately 8000 residential properties in the original Houston Heights. The housing stock is diverse and representative of almost all the styles built in the neighborhood from 1892. As of this writing, 74% of all the housing stock in the historic districts is original and the remainder has been redeveloped.



Boundaries of Historic Districts



Abstract

1995 City of Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance

(Ord. No. 95-228)

A. Appropriate/Compatible Additions to Existing Buildings and Sites

The Ordinance created the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) whose responsibilities for existing buildings, structures or sites include:

- * identifying buildings, structures, objects, sites that have the potential for designation as landmarks and historic districts
- * initiating the process for designation of individual landmarks and historic districts
- * increasing public awareness of the value of historical architectural conservation
- * granting or denying an application for a certificate of appropriateness for alteration, rehabilitation or construction of an exterior feature of
 - (i) any landmark
 - (ii) protected landmark
 - (iii) any building or structure in an historic district

To be deemed appropriate for a certificate of appropriateness, the application would have to satisfy a number of criteria including:

- (a) the proposed activity must retain and preserve the historical character of the property
- (b) the proposed activity must preserve the distinguishing qualities or character of the building, structure or site as a product of its own time and avoid alterations that seek to create an earlier or later appearance
- (c) the proposed activity must maintain or replicate distinctive stylistic exterior features or examples of skilled craftsmanship that characterizes the building, structure or object or site
- (d) new materials to be used for any exterior feature must be compatible with the materials being replaced in composition, design, texture and other visual qualities
- (e) the proposed replacement of missing exterior features, if any, should be an accurate duplication ... substantiated by available historical, physical or pictorial evidence and ...not on conjectural designs
- (f) proposed design for alterations or construction must be compatible with the size , scale, material and character of the property in which it is located
- (g) the setback of any proposed construction or alteration must be compatible with existing setbacks along the blockface and facing blockface(s)





Abstract

1995 City of Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance

(Ord. No. 95-228)

B. Compatible New Construction

For new construction in a designated historic district, the HAHC's criteria to award a Certificate of Appropriateness include:

- (a) the new construction must be compatible with the setbacks along the blockface and facing blockface(s)
- (b) the exterior features of new construction must be compatible with the exterior features of structures along the blockface or facing blockface(s)

- (c) the proportions of the new construction, including height, width, lengths and roofline must be compatible with structures and objects along the blockface or blockface(s)

The ordinance states that “nothing in the foregoing shall be construed to require or impose a single architectural style in any historic district.”



