

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Kemerton Dean House
OWNERS: James and Celia Munisteri
APPLICANTS: James and Celia Munisteri
LOCATION: 1912 Bellmeade Road – River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: I.b
HPO FILE NO: 06L128
DATE ACCEPTED: 07-15-06
HAHC HEARING DATE: 08-24-06
PC HEARING DATE: 08-31-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 3, Block 11, River Oaks Country Club Estates Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes an historic two-story, brick residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The residence at 1912 Bellmeade was one of the earlier residences constructed in River Oaks. In 1925, John Staub, a noted Houston architect, designed 1912 Bellmeade for his former Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) classmate and fraternity brother, Kemerton Dean. Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood. The house at 1912 Bellmeade is designed in a New England Gothic style, which is representative of Staub's use of romantic European vernacular styles during the 1920s.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Kemerton Dean was a Bostonian who relocated to Houston with his Houstonian wife, Ada Dodge. Dean worked for the cotton-exporting firm of Sanders & Company, and one of his partners was Kenneth Womack. Womack had hired Staub to supervise a Shadyside home project and ultimately referred Staub for the River Oaks Country Club project. He urged Dean to purchase a lot in River Oaks and hire and referred Staub as the architect. The house was built in 1926. On a humorous note, Dean's father-in-law wondered why Dean would want to build so far away from town.

According to the Handbook of Texas online, John Staub (1892-1981) began his architectural practice in New York in 1916. In 1921, he came to Houston to supervise a project in the Shadyside neighborhood, and went on to establish his own practice here in 1923. Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood. His first independent commission in Houston was the River Oaks Country Club. He was then retained by the Hogg brothers to design two model homes for the developing River Oaks subdivision. As his career progressed, he was tapped as primary architect (with Birdsall Briscoe named associate architect) to design Bayou Bend, the home of Ima Hogg. Between 1924 and 1958, he designed thirty-one houses in River Oaks, in addition to making designs for homes that were never built, as well as designing renovations and extensions for existing homes. Outside of River Oaks, Staub homes from this period were built in Broadacres, Courtlandt Place, and the Fort Worth neighborhood of River Crest. Additional Staub homes may be found in Beaumont, Dallas, and Memphis, Tennessee, some of which are open to the public as museums.

In addition to residential work, Staub designed the parish house of Palmer Memorial Church, the Junior League Building, and the Bayou Club in Houston. His firm designed buildings for the campuses of the University of Texas, Rice University, University of Houston, and the Texas Medical Center. He was the primary architect on the John Reagan High School project as well. Staub, Rather, and Howze also consulted with Jim Goodwin of Pierce and Pierce in the new building and planetarium for the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

According to the article about River Oaks in the *Handbook of Texas Online*, River Oaks was developed "by Buffalo Bayou and Memorial Park in west central Houston. The residential garden suburb, which comprises 1,100 acres, was developed in the 1920s by Michael Hogg and attorney, Hugh Potter, who in 1923 obtained an option to purchase 200 acres surrounding the River Oaks Country Club. In 1924 Hogg organized Country Club Estates to promote the development. The two developers retained Kansas City landscape architects, Hare and Hare, to provide a master plan that would protect the environmental integrity and natural beauty of the area. They also hired J. C. Nichols, who built one of the first major shopping centers in the United States, to serve as a design consultant. The master plan included homesites, a fifteen-acre campus for River Oaks Elementary School, two shopping centers, and esplanades planted with flowers. It called for underground utility lines, eliminated alleys, allowed only three intersecting streets, provided rigid building codes, and eventually banned all commercial traffic. Deed restrictions and centralized community control assured exclusivity; approval of house designs by a panel of architects and citizens and a purchase price of at least \$7,000 were required. The first home in the area, built by Will and Sue Clayton, is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Among the other notable houses is Ima Hogg's family home, Bayou Bend (N.R.; City of Houston Landmark), designed by John F. Staub and Birdsall P. Briscoe. In the late 1920s the development lost money, but by the late 1930s developers had invested \$3 million in the project, and the community had begun to influence development patterns downtown. In the 1930s River Oaks was at the geographic center of Houston. The community operated independently for three years, after which it was annexed by the city."

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

During the 1920s, Staub employed a full range of romantic European vernacular styles in his residential architecture. The Staub design for 1912 Bellmeade was influenced by the medieval English building traditions found in the seventeenth-century architecture of New England. According to Howard Barnstone's *The Architecture of John Staub*, the residence at 1912 Bellmeade incorporates aspects of the New England Gothic style, such as the steeply pitched roofs and gables. Barnstone also states that the use of brick and the large casement windows were typical Staub modifications to the traditional style. The aesthetically pleasing, studied asymmetry that became Staub's unique hallmark is also evident. The house is listed in the AIA Houston Architectural Guide, and is described as a "New England colonial style house set in a lush Houston garden."

The house at 1912 Bellmeade was restored by Gretchen and Peter Jameson in 1987, utilizing architect Larry S. Davis. The Jamesons added a master bathroom and expanded the master suite. For privacy purposes, they also built an attractive brick wall along the Groveland Street side of the house. The wall brick is the same brick as was used for the house. They updated the kitchen and incorporated a porch area into the sunny breakfast area. The casement windows evident in the original design were carried out through the rest of the house. In the Houston Architectural Guide, architectural historian Stephen Fox described the restoration as a "tactful expansion."

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Current owners Celia and James Munisteri have the original John Staub architectural renderings.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Diana DuCroz, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Handbook of Texas Online, "Staub, John Fanz",
<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/fst94.html>

Barnstone, Howard, *The Architecture of John F. Staub: Houston and the South*, University of Texas Press, 1979.

Fox, Stephen, ed., *Houston Architectural Guide*, 2nd edition, American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, 1999.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;		

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- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark Designation of the Kemerton Dean House at 1912 Bellmeade Road.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to Houston City Council the Landmark Designation of the Kemerton Dean House at 1912 Bellmeade Road.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
KEMERTON DEAN HOUSE
1912 BELLMEADE ROAD
NOT TO SCALE

