

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

AGENDA ITEM: *

LANDMARK NAME: Delco House

OWNERS: Vernice White

APPLICANTS: SAME AS OWNER

LOCATION: 807 N. Loop – Independence Heights

HPO FILE NO.: HP2024_0115

DATE ACCEPTED:

HAHC HEARING: 5/9/2024

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 16, Block 8, McComb L B, Independence Heights, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story wood frame single family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Delco home was built by the early 1930s and owned by Nelson and Pauline Delco. The Delco family, which settled at 6916 N. Main in 1938, was forced to move their home in 1958 as the 610 Loop was constructed through the community. The Delco House now sits at 807 N. Loop. The 1360 square foot single-story bungalow home meets Criteria 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation. The Delco Home is an example of the historic homes constructed in the community at the height of prosperity and growth during 1910-1940. The home is also representative of a later era of displacement and change suffered by the Independence Heights community brought by Houston's expansion and development during the 1950s.

Settled by African Americans as early as 1910, the Independence Heights incorporated becoming the first Black municipality in Texas in 1915. Today, the Independence Heights community remains predominately African American, and since 1997 has been nationally recognized as the *Independence Heights Residential Historic District*. However, many of the contributing structures within this district have been sold and demolished. The community is currently under continuous threat due to area development, freeway expansion projects and gentrification. If designated, the Delco House will become the fourth City of Houston Landmark in the historical Independence Heights helping to preserve the community's history and cultural heritage.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

During the early 1900s, the Wright Land Company developed and established Independence Heights in Houston, Texas. The first African American families began buying land and settling the neighborhood by 1908. The community quickly flourished to over 600 residents who voted to incorporate on January 24, 1915, becoming the first African American municipality in the state of Texas. By the late 1920s, there were over 700 residents, 40 Black owned businesses, seven churches and two schools in the city. The residents elected three mayors before voting to dissolve the incorporation and annex to the city of Houston on December 26, 1929.

The Delcos purchased their home on the corner of N. Main Street and 29th Avenue in 1938. This property is visible on the original Independence Heights Annex subdivision plat dated 1910 and within the incorporated boundaries of 1915 (Figure 1). Independence Heights was no longer a separate municipality when the Delcos moved in by 1938, however, the community continued to grow and support residents through educational and economic opportunities not available in other areas of Houston.

The Delco Family

The Delco Home story begins with two brothers, Exalton (1905-1982) and Nelson (1910-1982), born in Abberville, Louisiana during the early nineteenth century to parents Loudice and Odelia Delco. In 1928, Exalton married Pauline Brussard (1906-1997) and welcomed their first child Exalton Delco Jr, followed by sons Joseph (1932) and Roosevelt (1936). In 1931, Nelson married Pauline Gaspard (1909-1988) and welcomed their only child, Lawrence, in 1931. By 1930, the Delco family was living in Houston's Third Ward community.

The reason the Delco brothers moved to Houston is unknown. Likely they moved to the city for the many economic opportunities available during the period. Exalton began working as a butler and driver for the Farish family at 10 Remington Lane (1932 City of Houston Directory). His employer, William Farish II was President of Standard Oil at the time. His father, William Farish II was the nephew of Jefferson David. Exalton worked for the Farish family for 50 years. Nelson worked at Hughes Tool Company and later as a longshoreman. He was an active union member of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) Local #1331.

By 1935, the brothers were living in Independence Heights. Exalton purchased a home at 607 E 31st Street (no longer extant), and Nelson was renting a home on E 31st Street. In 1938, Nelson purchased a home on 6916 N. Main, just two blocks south of his brother where he lived until 1958 when the home was moved to its current location, 6916 N. Loop.

Nelson's son, Lawrence married Elvia Whiteside (1934-2000) and moved to Fifth Ward's French Town by 1959. Exalton Jr. attended Fisk University where he met Wilhelmina Fitzgerald (1930). The two married in 1952. The two moved back to Independence Heights until moving to Austin in 1957 where Exalton Jr. pursued a doctorate degree at the University of Texas. He became the first African American to earn a PhD in Zoology from the University of Texas. His wife Wilhelmina was elected to the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees in 1968, becoming the first African American elected to public office in the city. She went on to serve in the Texas House of Representatives for ten terms.

Vernice White

The Delco family joined the St Anne De Beaupre Catholic Church after moving to Houston. It is St Anne De Beaupre Catholic Church where they met Vernice White and her husband Preston. The Whites moved to Independence Heights in 1964, purchasing a home on 32nd Street and welcoming two children. The Delcos welcomed the newcomers to the community, and all quickly became like family.

Vernice purchased the Delco House on 6916 N. Loop after the death of her friends, Nelson in 1982 followed by Pauline in 1988, to preserve the Delco family legacy. Exalton's home on E 31st was demolished within the last 20 years, leaving Nelson's home as the remaining historic marker for the family in Independence Heights.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Most properties in Independence Heights date from 1908 to 1940s and include residential, commercial, and institutional uses. The buildings range from traditional or vernacular forms to larger national building trends of the period. Many of the houses in Independence Heights reflect typical middle-class functional housing patterns of the early 20th century and are largely one-story wood frame buildings of less than 1,000 square feet. Traditional house forms include the shotgun (hipped roof and gable-front), L-plan, modified L plan, pyramidal roofed, and center-passage. The major house form is the simple bungalow with side-gable or front-gable varieties.

The Delco House is a 1360 square foot single-story wood frame dwelling with a pyramidal roof and front-gable porch. It includes a living room, dining room, kitchen with sitting area, two bathrooms and three bedrooms. All original windows and wood flooring are intact. These features date prior to the home being moved, likely original ca. 1930s features. The porch components (ca. 1958) are also intact. A "remodel of interior and exterior" was made to the home after it was moved in 1958 to its current location (1958 Harris County Building Assessment). The exact remodel that occurred is unknown, but the structure was increased to 1360 square foot by this time. Since 1958, no other restoration or remodel has occurred. The home does not have central air conditioning or heat. The exterior wood siding of the home was painted yellow, from the original white color, within the past ten years. The 4000 square foot lot includes a non-historic-age storage shed and paved walkway (no paved driveway).

Although the exact construction date is unknown for the building, a 1934 Harris County Building Assessment report includes a 600 square foot home (Lot 1, Block 39). Purchase of the property is dated February 7, 1938, between Minor Stewart (grantor) and Nelson and Pauline Delco. Based on deed, census and city directory records Nelson and Pauline Delco owned the home at its original location on 6916 N. Main Street from 1938 to 1958, when it was moved to its current location at 807 N. Loop upon construction of I-610. The Delco House represents today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancestry.com

City of Houston City Directories; 1930 to 1970

Exalton Delco: UT's First African American PH.D in Zoology. The University of Texas at Austin; Department of Integrative Biology. 2017. <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/about/history/exalton-delco>

FamilySearch.org

Harris County Assessors Block Books

Harris County Deed Records

Harris County Subdivision Maps

Photos



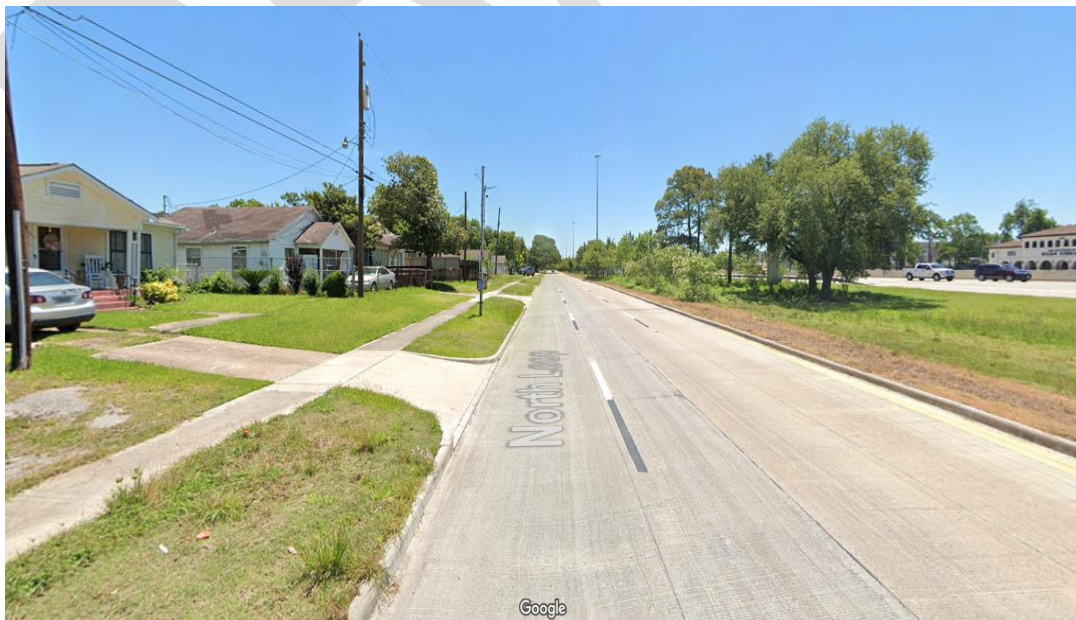
Photograph 1. View facing north.



Photograph 2. View facing southeast.



Photograph 3. Detail; View facing north.



Photograph 4. Street view along 610 Loop; View facing east.
Image Captured May 2022 (Google 2023).

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, 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 | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" 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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |

AND

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)). |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

- | S | NA | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director. |

- (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or
- (4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Delco House at 807 North Loop, Houston, Texas, 77022.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION :

DRAFT