

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Sarah Francelia Bell Home

OWNER: Barbara Hilburn

APPLICANT: Barbara Hilburn

LOCATION: 1111 Rosalie Street

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Jun-29-2004

AGENDA ITEM: I

P.C.MEETING DATE: Aug-05-2004

HPO FILE NO.: 04L116

DATE ACCEPTED: Jun-15-04

HAHC HEARING DATE: 07-29-04

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 10 and Tract 9, Block 2, Holman Outlot 31, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a three-story, structural brick commercial building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Sarah Francelia Bell Home, established to provide living assistance for indigent women, was built in 1922 at the bequest and through funds provided by Sarah Francelia Bell in her will in 1911. Although a native of Connecticut, Sarah Francelia Bell (nee McElroy) came to Texas as a young child with her Texas pioneer parents, who joined Stephen F. Austin there in the early 1830s at his settlement called San Felipe de Austin. The Home was constructed and funded by the Trust established with her name for the purpose, as she requested, to provide living assistance for indigent widows of Methodist ministers in Houston. She requested that the Methodist Church manage and administer the Trust in her stead. It was not until 1922 that the Board of the Trust and the Trustees of the "Methodist Hospital Movement," whose membership overlapped, had raised the necessary funds to begin construction. Through their cooperative effort, the Trust Board and Hospital Trustees both not only acted upon the request of Bell, but also were able to establish the Methodist Hospital in Houston.

The Methodist Hospital movement had its beginning when Dr. Oscar L. Norsworthy established the Norsworthy Hospital in 1908. He later decided to pursue only medical research and made a generous offer of the facility to the Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. After a few years of fundraising, the plan materialized when the Trustees chose James Ruskin Bailey, a Houston architect, who was related by marriage to one of the Trustees, and the project was underway. They chose a site for the Home adjacent to the hospital and let the contract for the construction to Central Construction Company on August 16, 1922. Thus, the Sarah Francelia Bell Home and the Methodist Hospital movement was initiated. After construction, the Trustees realized that the Home was underutilized as there were not enough residents to occupy the entire three-story building. Although the Home continued to operate as originally established, the remaining portion of the building was used by Methodist Hospital for additional treatment facilities, and later as the first facility specifically designed for Nurse Housing. When Methodist Hospital relocated and first opened in the "new" Medical Center in 1951, the old site, including the Home, was sold to various individual owners, who used the buildings for many other purposes. However, the Sarah Francelia Bell Trust continues to provide needed living assistance to women as provided for in the original bequest by Sarah Francelia Bell. It is through her generosity that the Methodist Church provides living assistance at their facilities in Texas, including Happy Harbor Methodist Home, La Porte or Moody House, Galveston, where four women are receiving assistance to this very day.

The Sarah Francelia Bell Home Building remains today as the only physical remnant in Houston, Texas of the first endeavor to establish the Methodist Hospital in Houston, now recognized as one of the best medical

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facilities worldwide. Moreover, the current Trustees of the Sarah Francelia Bell Trust, whose current assets are approximately \$250,000, have ventured to say “It is interesting to speculate if the great Methodist Hospital of today would even be here now if the Sarah Francelia Bell Trust had not come to its aid back in 1922” when there were shortfalls during early construction and other troubling times during the Great Depression.

Methodist Hospital, an internationally known referral hospital, was constructed in 1922, opening in 1924. It developed from a thirty-bed private hospital founded in 1908 by Dr. Oscar L. Norsworthy (1871-1935). The Norsworthy Hospital Building was a rectangular, five-story building with a 70’ front presence on Rosalie Street whose address was known as 3020 San Jacinto in the 1919 Houston City Directory. The building also featured a four-story porch gallery on the front façade. It occupied the south half of the north half of Block 2, Holman Outlot 31. When the Sarah Francelia Bell Home was built in 1922, it was placed on the west side of the Norsworthy Hospital building, also fronting Rosalie Street, with a 40’ front presence. In the 1925 City Directory the address was shown as 1111 Rosalie Street. By the 1930s an additional, U-shaped, two-story, brick hospital building with a raised basement had been constructed facing San Jacinto Street at Rosalie. The building featured a gable end roof with clipped gable ends and a huge wall dormer in the center, facing Rosalie. The address and name of the building was still shown as the Norsworthy Hospital in the 1925 Directory. A fourth building, known as the “little hospital,” was built a little later at the corner of San Jacinto (facing San Jacinto) and Anita by Methodist Hospital Blue Bird Circle for sick and crippled children. The total beds for Methodist, counting the upper two floors of the Sarah Francelia Bell Home, varied from ninety to one hundred and fifty, according to need and the arrangement of space.

The Sarah Francelia Bell Home remained closely associated with the hospital. The residents were cared for by resident physicians, ate in the hospital dining room, and were sent trays if they were confined to their rooms. But the home did not attract in great numbers the elderly women for whom it was planned. Probably no more than twelve lived there at any one time, and they all lived on the ground floor for the sake of their convenience. This left the two upper floors free for use by the hospital either as a residence for nurses and student nurses or as hospital rooms.

The Sarah Francelia Bell Home is a three-story, structural brick masonry building, a type of building not commonly found in the Midtown area. It features a flat roof with a three foot high parapet wall. Just under the parapet wall on the South elevation are three concrete cornices. The upper cornice projects out two feet from the building and the other two smaller cornices run above and below the window openings on the third floor. Also on the south elevation are two examples of brick corbelling, approximately two and one-half feet by four feet in size. The building’s brick walls consist of three courses of Lucas and San Jacinto brick on the first two floors, and two courses on the third floor. The entry features a five step concrete stoop leading up to a single, multi-light entry door with multi-light sidelights on either side and arched, single transom window above..

The floor plan consists of a central hallway on each floor with one large bay on both sides and a door at the far end of the hallway. The internal staircase leading from the ground floor to the third floor features a handrail with iron balusters ending with forged iron newel posts. Originally there were rooms along each side of the hallway, now destroyed by vandals, and no other original interior elements survived.

The architect for the Methodist Hospital and the Sarah Francelia Bell Home was James Ruskin Bailey. Bailey was a Houston architect who practiced for a number of years in Houston. Between the years 1914 and 1919, he was in partnership with Joseph Finger, another prominent Houston architect (Handbook of Texas). Bailey was closely tied to the Methodist community, most likely the reason for his selection. When Bailey’s firm was chosen for the design of the Methodist Hospital building and the Sarah Francelia Bell Home in 1922, his father-in-law, John T. Scott, offered to resign from the Trustees of the Methodist Hospital so there would be no

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conflict. However, the other trustees would not accept his resignation, but instead honored Scott's request that he not serve on the building committee. Scott was also an old member of Shearn Methodist Church, and likely a life-long friend of Mrs. Bell. Scott, who was President of the First National Bank of Houston, served as Board President of the Methodist Hospital from 1922 to 1941. While Scott was president, Bailey designed the six-story educational building of the First Methodist Church at 1320 Main Street in 1929, which when built, "was erected for possible conversion into an office building" (Fox). His other commissions included the Public National Bank Building (1925) at 402 Main Street and Preston (N.R.; City of Houston Landmark); John Henry Kirby House (1926 remodeling) at 2006 Smith Street; Eastwood Elementary School (1927 rear addition) at 100 Telephone Road; and Peden Company Building (1930) at 610 North San Jacinto (Fox).

Among its early trustees of the Methodist Hospital were William L. Clayton, Jesse H. Jones, and Walter W. Fondren. A long-term benefactor was Ella Cochrum (Mrs. Walter W.) Fondren, who became a trustee after her husband's death and who for many decades was the only woman on the board. Methodist struggled to survive during its early years. It remained open during the Great Depression only through the management of its administrator, Josie Mooring Roberts. It took a new direction after World War II due to the actions of two Houston philanthropists, Monroe D. Anderson and Hugh Roy Cullen. Anderson left a bequest of \$22 million that led to the development of the Texas Medical Center at Houston. Cullen, a legendary oilman, and his wife Lillie gave \$1 million to Methodist Hospital, a gift that enabled it to move to the Medical Center. The new 300-bed facility opened in 1951.

Methodist became a teaching hospital for Baylor University College of Medicine, which had also moved to the Texas Medical Center. Because of Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, the Baylor affiliation transformed Methodist from a good hospital into a great one. DeBakey, who joined Baylor in 1948, pioneered cardiovascular procedures that brought him wide acclaim. Patients from all over the world, including the Duke of Windsor, came to him for treatment and taxed the facilities of the hospital during the 1950s and 1960s. To accommodate these patients and the growing population of Houston, Methodist enlarged to 1,040 beds by 1971 under the administration of Ted Bowen. The growth continued under the administration of Larry Mathis, who succeeded Bowen in 1983. By 1990 the Methodist Hospital complex included more than 1,500 beds, outpatient facilities, office buildings, parking garages, and a hotel. By various agreements, Methodist also included a number of hospitals in other locations that utilized its specialists and high technology. While maintaining its position as a cardiovascular center, Methodist, in cooperation with Baylor, also pioneered in organ transplants, neurological disorders of children, and other areas of research and development. Chairmen of the board of directors have been John T. Scott, Raymond P. Elledge, Walter L. Goldston, Robert A. Shepherd, Sr., O'Banion Williams, Curtis B. Delhomme, and A. Frank Smith, Jr. (Sibley).

Sarah Francelia McElroy was born in 1825 in Hartford, Connecticut, and came to Texas with her four siblings and parents, Philip and Almyra McElroy, in 1832, first settling on the Colorado River, eight miles below the present city of Austin. This early Texas pioneer family then settled the next year with Stephen F. Austin at San Felipe de Austin. Founded by Austin in 1824, San Felipe de Austin, located on the west bank of the Brazos River at the Old San Antonio Road crossing, was the unofficial capital of Texas and became the first urban center in the Austin colony. The town, simply called San Felipe, was unquestionably the social, economic and political center of the colony. One of the earliest newspapers in Texas, the *Texas Gazette*, began publication there in 1829. Sarah's father, Philip McElroy died in 1835 near San Felipe de Austin, Austin County, and her mother, Almyra, his widow, and all of her children left their possessions behind, and traveled on horseback to the banks of the Sabine River for safety when on March 30, 1836, the town was burned to keep it from falling into the hands of the advancing Mexican army. The fleeing eastward was known as the Runaway Scrape. According to a biography of Sarah's brother, Charles S. McElroy, which was published in the "History of Fort Bend County," the family left the Sabine River and after the Battle of San Jacinto, then came to Harrisburg, and

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from there to Houston in 1837 where they lived “in the first house built there.” “The house was double log cabins, situated at the foot of what is now Main Street, on Buffalo Bayou, and if still standing would be in the middle of the street.” After the victory at San Jacinto, many returned to San Felipe, as did Almyra McElroy. On February 4, 1838 as widow of Philip McElroy, she was granted one labor of land. She was married for a second time shortly thereafter to George W. Powell, another early Texas pioneer, who had been granted a 1/3 League on July 1836, for being a “Citizen of the Republic.” They had a son named George P. Powell. Almyra McElroy Powell died shortly thereafter on November 20, 1839 and was buried in Old Founder’s Park Cemetery in Houston, as were some of her children who had preceded her in death. Sarah Francelia Bell’s siblings were: Elizabeth McElroy, who married 1) Zadoc Hubbard and 2) F. N. Butt; Henry P. McElroy; Charles S. McElroy who married Elizabeth R. Little; and Mary Almyra McElroy and Napoleon B. McElroy (the only child born in Texas in 1832), both who died young and are buried in Old Founder;s Park Cemetery on W. Dallas Street, in Houston.

Sarah McElroy was first married on September 19, 1844 in Houston to Andrew Crawford, a tailor, entrepreneur, and charter member of Shearn Methodist Church (History of Shearn Church). This is where her close affiliation with the Methodist Church began. While married to Crawford, they adopted a girl with the given name of “Savannah Georgia” before 1860 as the seven year old girl was living with the Crawfords in the 1860 census. The “adoption” is confirmed in the will of Sarah F. Bell, dated July 13, 1911 (probated after her death on August 12, 1914, Harris County, Texas), in which she mentions her adopted daughter, “Mrs. Savannah G. Cohen.” According to family descendants, Savannah was most likely a daughter of one of the four Terry brothers, of Harris and Brazoria County, who were sons of [Joseph Royall Terry and Sarah "Sallie" D. Smith, daughter of Obedience Fort and David Smith \(Ancestry.com\)](#). Obedience Fort Smith was another early Texas pioneer. Research completed thus far, has not produced conclusive proof regarding the actual parents of Savannah.

[Andrew Crawford, husband of Sarah McElroy Crawford, was engaged in the clothing business as he was listed as a tailor in the census and city directory of Houston, although he had other business interests as well.](#) Andrew Crawford, who had been a charter member of Shearn Church, became a prominent citizen of Houston. He died on March 29, 1867 (tombstone) and was buried in the Old City Cemetery (now known as Founder’s Park) on W. Dallas Street (Muir). Andrew J. Burke was the executor of the will of Andrew Crawford, and Charles Shearn, founder of Shearn Church, assisted in the inventory. The cemetery where Crawford is buried was known as “old Methodist Cemetery” according to the 1866 city directory of Houston. Their daughter, Savannah used the name of Crawford when she was married in Houston [on Feb 6, 1868](#) to Laurence L. Cohen. He was a native of South Carolina and a veteran of the Confederacy. He later became a member of Dick Dowling Camp, Houston, Texas.

After Andrew Crawford died, [Sarah Crawford is found living with her sister, Elizabeth Butt and her husband, F. N. Butt, in the 1870 census of Harris County.](#) According to the History of Shearn Church, Mrs. Butt was a charter member of Shearn’s “Ladies’ Aid Society,” organized in 1876, to provide relief to the poor. Savannah Georgia Cohen’s husband, Laurence Ludlow Cohen, Sr., who was listed as a portrait painter in the Houston City Directory and in the 1880 Census Harris County Texas, also was a Professor of Art. He and his wife were also very active members of the Methodist Church as was Mrs. Bell and her sister. In March 1882 Cohen was named Superintendent of the Methodist Mission of North Houston, when Shearn Church began to provide worship services and a Sabbath School to those living along White Oak Bayou.

[Sarah McElroy Crawford married her second husband, John W. Bell, later that year on Oct 11, 1870 in Harris County. John W. Bell was a native of Scott County, Kentucky having come to Houston soon after completing his service in the Confederate army in Mississippi, where he was commissioned as a Lieutenant. He began work](#)

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as a carpenter in Houston, but later became engaged in the business as a railroad builder. He, like Laurence L. Cohen, husband of Savannah G. Crawford Cohen, was a member of Dick Dowling Camp No. 197 in Houston. The Bells lived at 1014 Walker Street at Fannin. John W. Bell died at his home on September 5, 1911 and was buried in Glenwood Cemetery. His monument reads: "Major John W. Bell, born near Lexington, Kentucky December 4, 1825, died September 5, 1911, A brave soldier in the Mexican War – A staunch defender of the Confederacy – A prominent Mason, A soldier of Christ." The Cross of Honor has also been bestowed on his grave by Robert E. Lee Chapter United Daughters of the Confederacy.

His wife, Sarah Francelia Bell, died at her home on August 12, 1914 and is buried in Glenwood Cemetery. The inscription on the joint monument with her husband John W. Bell reads "Born in Hartford, Connecticut December 10, 1825, died in Harris County, Texas August 12, 1914." Her obituary revealed that she was a Charter Member of Old Shearn Methodist Church. According to the History of Shearn Church (1908), the church was the first brick church in Houston, and it was dedicated in 1843. The pastor in 1844 was Rev. Josiah W. Whipple, and when he married Sarah McElroy (Sarah Francelia Bell) to Andrew Crawford there that year, it was one of his first weddings in which he officiated as minister. Mrs. Bell and her second husband, John W. Bell, are also mentioned in the history which recounts that "she and her husband are constant attendants on the church services at this time (1908)." At the time of Mrs. Bell's death, Shearn was known as First Methodist Church, at Main and Clay. Dr. C. S. Wright, pastor officiated at her funeral as did Rev. J. W. Moore of Chattanooga, Tennessee, one time pastor of Shearn. Sarah's obituary also referred to her as an early pioneer of Houston. It also mentions that when Mrs. Bell and her family fled San Felipe, they had to abandon all their worldly possessions except for a large family bible, which Mrs. Bell and her mother carried on horseback, now in Mrs. Bell's possession. The funeral was held at First Methodist Church, and the bible used during the service was the very bible saved by Mrs. Bell and her mother.

Sarah Francelia Bell had been very generous in her bequests to her daughter and other relatives in her will, while leaving the bulk of her estate for the purpose of assisting indigent Methodist women of Houston. Her daughter, Savannah Georgia Crawford Cohen, died on January 28, 1945 in Houston at her home at 2702 Hamilton Street, which she had inherited from her mother as provided for in her 1911 will. Savannah, according to her obituary in the *Houston Post*, had lived most of her life in Houston and had been an active member and worker at St. Paul's Methodist Church and in her bible class. Her husband, Laurence Ludlow Cohen, had preceded her in death on August 20, 1918 at their summer home in Kemah, Galveston County, Texas. Both are buried in Glenwood Cemetery, Houston. The Cross of Honor has also been bestowed on Cohen's grave by Robert E. Lee Chapter United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Found among the burial records at Glenwood Cemetery was a letter and brochure dated 1992 written by Rev. Dr. Guston H. Browning, United Methodist Foundation, Texas Annual Conference, Houston, Texas. The information included about Mrs. Sarah Francelia Bell was placed there in the hopes that someone would visit the cemetery one day and discover information about "An Untold Story" about service to elderly women. The brochure begins: "An Untold Story – Unknown to most people in the Texas Annual Conference, a small group of seven trustees elected by the Conferences seek faithfully to assist in caring for needy elderly women according to the wishes of Mrs. Sarah Francelia Bell, a Christian woman who died August 12, 1914. Hers and theirs is a story which needs to be expanded in order to fulfill more completely the vision Mrs. Bell expressed in her Will." It goes on further to state: "After certain specific bequests, Mrs. Bell in her will left the remainder of her property for 'the establishment and maintenance of an old ladies home, to be built of brick' in the city of Houston. It was to be operated under control and supervision of the Texas Conference 'to shelter, support, and accommodate, first, indigent widows of ministers of said church . . . and then, if more can be accommodated, aged, indigent lady members of said church in the State of Texas, and such others, especially the sick, infirmed

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or helpless, as the Trustees of said Home, in the spirit of Christianity, may see proper to admit.” Futhermore, it states according to “The Methodist Hospital of Houston” by Sibley “when construction costs exceeded original estimates and funds on hand (for the building of the Methodist Hospital), the Sarah Francelia Bell Trust loaned the Methodist Hospital \$60,000 at 7 percent interest and took a mortgage on the assets of the hospital. With the Bell loan, the construction continued, and during the Great Depression, “the interest rate on the Hospital’s loan was reduced by the Bell Trustees to 6 percent. Final payment on the loan was not made until late 1944 when ‘for the first time in its existence (the hospital) was out of debt. The payment cleared the way for a new building program.’” And then the brochure states: “It is interesting to speculate if the great Methodist Hospital of today would even be here now if the Sarah Francelia Bell Trust had not come to its aid in 1922.”

In her will, Mrs. Bell said “I pray God’s richest blessings upon said Home and trust that it shall be and remain a Christian shelter, refuge and home for those in need of its accommodation.”

Restoration History

The Sarah Francelia Bell Home was connected at the second floor level on the east side to the Norsworthy Hospital (built around 1908) and the main Methodist structure sometime in the mid 1920's according to the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. The Norsworthy Hospital, Methodist Hospital and the Blue Bird Circle building have been demolished. No exterior changes to the Sarah Francelia Bell Home have been made since its construction, although all original windows were removed and had to be replaced with compatible wood windows. A wood deck and ramp has been installed at the back of the building for ADA purposes. The interior, which had been completely gutted by previous owners and vandals, has been reconstructed as offices but the interior retains its central corridors with offices on either side. Transom windows have been reconstructed above the interior doors which remain in their original locations into the former hospital rooms which are now offices.

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
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- (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;
- (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;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (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 Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend Landmark Designation to City Council of the Sarah Francelia Bell Home at 1111 Rosalie Street.

SITE LOCATION MAP
SARAH FRANCELIA BELL HOME
1111 ROSALIE STREET
NOT TO SCALE