

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Houston Heights Woman's Club Building
OWNER: Houston Heights Woman's Club
APPLICANT: Houston Heights Woman's Club
LOCATION: 1846 Harvard Street – Houston Heights
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: II.c
HPO FILE NO.: 06PL024
DATE ACCEPTED: 8-6-06
HAHC HEARING: 9-24-06
PC HEARING: 9-28-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 25, Block 105, Houston Heights Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a one story, wood frame social hall building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The building at 1846 Harvard Street is contained within the boundaries of Houston Heights, which was designated a Multiple Resources Area (MRA) by the National Register Program on June 22, 1983. It was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 22, 1983 as well as being designated as a Landmark of the City of Houston. The Houston Heights Woman's Club building was built in 1912 in the bungalow style. Many social and cultural events have been held at the clubhouse. Since 1912 the building is still used by the Houston Heights Woman's Club as originally planned, and where plans have been made and implemented to help others in need, and where they continue their work even today.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

According to Sister Agatha's History of Houston Heights, "Since its first settlement a very decided civic activity had marked the Heights, the Houston Heights Literary Club being the outstanding organization for women. On January 15, 1900, sixteen women of the Heights met at the home of Mrs. C. R. Cummings and formed the Literary Club. Almost immediately after organization of the club, the president, Mrs. Cummings, moved from the Heights and Mrs. C. A McKinney succeeded in office.

In the famous *Blue Book* for 1907-1908 is the following entry: HOUSTON HEIGHTS LITERARY CLUB - Organized January, 1899. Membership 35. Meets every Wednesday from October to June at home of president. Officers and executive board: Mrs. W. G. Love, president; Mrs. W. W. Kellogg, first vice-president; Mrs. D.M.Duller, second vice-president; Mrs. Geo. C. Van Demark, recording secretary; Mrs. M. Sheehan, corresponding secretary; Mrs. P. B. Thornton, treasurer. Executive board; Mesdames W. G. Love, W. W. Kellogg, D. M. Duller, Geo. C. Van Demark, F. F. Dexter, W. E. Bennett, and H. N. Jones, Course of study for 1907-8, 'American Studies.'"

Sister Agatha continues, "Mrs. C. A. McKinney gave 1900 for the club's date of organization, so evidently the *Blue Book* made a mistake in its earlier date. Meetings were held at the home of the president until increased membership made it necessary to have a club room. Mr. O. M. Carter then gave space in his power house at the waterworks on 19th Avenue. Meanwhile the Literary Club was outgrowing its single interest and expanding into enough departments to incorporate itself into the more general title of Woman's Club. In February, 1911, the Arts and Crafts Club, the Musical and

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Social Club, and the original Literary Club merged into the Houston Heights Woman's Club. All these different groups had come from the membership of the Literary Club or its associates. The charter members of the Woman's Club were: Mesdames W. E. Bennett, O. F. Carroll, Thomas S. Lowry, A. W. Cooley, G. W. Hawkins, S. H. Webber, W. A. Renn, C. A. McKinney, W. A. McNeill, M. D. Ritter, H. S. Robinson, A. B. Sheldon, P. B. Thornton, W. B. Welling.” The first president of the Houston Heights Woman’s Club was Mrs. W. A. Renn, who presided at a reception for the opening of the building on Friday, October 18, 1912.

According to Pace’s history of Houston Heights, the “women held a carnival in 1911 to raise money for the building. The carnival was held on the Heights playground, now the site of Hamilton Junior High School, at Heights Boulevard and 20th Avenue. The club also held benefit plays to raise money. Most were organized, produced and directed by Mrs. Myrtle Cook Lowery, one of the Heights’ most beloved citizens, who graduated from her early home theatricals to become a nationally famous actress.” Sister Agatha relates, “*The Gilded Fool*, starring E. V. Whitty, was the first benefit sponsored by the ladies for the building fund.” Whitty’s own home, located at 124 W. 17th Avenue in Houston Heights, has been designated as a City of Houston Landmark.

According to Pace’s history of Houston Heights, “the Houston Heights Woman’s Club building was built in 1912 on a lot donated for that purpose by Mrs. D. D. Cooley (Helen Winfield Cooley). Her husband, D. D. Cooley, who was superintendent of construction of the Omaha and South Texas Land Company, which developed Houston Heights in 1891, owned many lots in the new development. It was the practice of Mr. Cooley to give his wife lots for her birthdays and anniversaries, one of which she donated to the Woman’s Club for their new clubhouse. Mrs. D. D. Cooley was a charter member of the Houston Heights Literary Club, which developed into the Houston Heights Woman’s Club.”

The *Suburbanite* has notice of the formal opening of the Club House on Friday, October 18, 1912.” Pace further notes, “the cost of the building was \$1,500 and by way of comparison the price of the piano (financed by the Music Study Department) was the same amount. Under the able direction of Mrs. W. A. Renn, President of the Woman's Club, the members had their building clear of debt within a year of its erection. Their only trouble was the stage. It was built high, when ladies wore skirts that touched the floor, and twice had to be lowered as skirts got higher and higher.”

Sister Agatha continues, “aside from its cultural character, the old Literary Club was an agency for great good among the poor in the Heights. The ladies held a ball once a year at the old skating rink and the proceeds were used as a charity fund. In various other ways the treasury of the club was replenished to serve as a community chest. Committees were appointed to investigate calls for aid and an amount of money was disbursed. The ladies would file the request together with a report on actual conditions found to warrant help, and then would give food and medical aid as far as they were able. There was no other social service available. Later, the Woman's Club also fostered the first school library in the Heights. Actually in the beginning the books were kept in the principal's office, but the teachers could send there and secure material for classroom use. At least the club had provided books. Very few schools in those days had a library room provided to house the books. When the Literary Club in February, 1911, merged with its sub-divisions to form the Woman's Club, it must have made other arrangements for its charity work because the *Suburbanite* on March 11, 1911, shows members of the Literary Club forming a new organization for that specific purpose: At a meeting held at the home of Mrs. M. Sheehan Monday afternoon for the purpose of forming a United Charity Organization in the Heights, the following officers were elected: President, Rev. C. A. Earl; Vice-President, Mrs. J.

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M. Limbocker; Treasurer, Mrs. M. Sheehan; Recording Secretary, Mrs. E. F. Patterson; Corresponding Secretary, Mrs. W. A. Renn.”

“A few weeks later the *Suburbanite* gives an encouraging report on its tag day receipts for charity sponsored by this new organization. The following year the newspaper again mentioned Tag Day and named the ladies responsible during Christmas week "to tag all going and coming on the street cars." Each lady had a number of young helpers appointed for different hours. These young ladies would board the car as it went round the belt and persuade each passenger to buy a tag. Perhaps the dread disease that gripped all Houston was the immediate cause for the organization of the United Charities. On April 6, 1912, the *Suburbanite* gives notice about closed theaters and public places of meeting all over Houston and the Heights: Cerebo-Spinal Meningitis. What do you know about it? Let us urge you to learn more about it by coming to the Baptist Temple, Thursday . . . The club women of the Heights founded their different groups for mutual pleasure and cultural improvement, but they also considered social work and educational help as part of their reason for organization.”

The members of the Houston Heights Woman’s Club were dedicated to their projects and activities as exemplified by the accomplishment of the construction of their own clubhouse. Many social and cultural events have been held at the clubhouse. Since 1912 the building is still used by the Houston Heights Woman’s Club as originally planned, and where plans have been made and implemented to help others in need, and where they continue their work even today.

Houston Heights was designated a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) because it was at one time an independent municipality. Within its original boundaries are numerous buildings individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Houston Heights was developed by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891. It was incorporated later as a city in 1896 and at that time, was the earliest and largest totally planned community in Texas. It flourished as a distinct municipality until the residents voted to be annexed by the city of Houston in 1918.

Today the area still maintains the feeling of a distinctive, self contained “small town” with its predominantly small 19th century, one story and two story Victorian-era homes, and numerous early 20th century bungalow style buildings. It also boasts a thriving business district on 19th Street (now predominantly antique shops and restaurants) and a large industrial district west of the business section. The neighborhood also contains the original city hall of Houston Heights (also the fire station and jail). Also located there are a number of historic churches, theatres, corner stores, private and public parks, and schools.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agatha, Sister M., History of Houston Heights 1891 – 1912, Premier Printing Company, Houston, Texas, 1956.

Pace, G. Randle and Deborah Markey, Houston Heights, A Historical Portrait and A Contemporary Perspective 1891 – 1991, Tribune Publishing, Houston, Texas, 1991.

The information and sources for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

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APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

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

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider three or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the Protected Landmark designation. If the HAHC reviews an application for designation of a Protected Landmark initiated after the designation of the Landmark, the HAHC shall review the basis for its initial recommendation for designation and may recommend designation of the landmark as a protected landmark unless the property owner elects to designate and if the landmark has met at least (3) three of the criteria of Section 33-224 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) at the time of its designation or, based upon additional information considered by the HAHC, the landmark then meets at least (3) three of criteria of Section 33-224 of the HPO, as follows:

- | S | NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <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 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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" 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; | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. | | |

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

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- The property was listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

OR

- The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark designation of the Houston Heights Woman’s Club Building at 1846 Harvard Street.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
HOUSTON HEIGHTS WOMAN'S CLUB BUILDING
1846 HARVARD STREET
NOT TO SCALE