

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** City of Houston Fire Station No. 27

(surplus site no longer used as a fire station)

**OWNER:** City of Houston, Texas

**APPLICANT:** City of Houston, Fire Department

**LOCATION:** 6302 Lyons Avenue

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** III

**P.C. MEETING DATE:** 03-02-06

**HPO FILE NO.:** 06PL19

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 2-13-06

**HAHC HEARING DATE:** 2-23-06

### SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4, Block 54, Denver Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, historic fire station building.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Fire Station No. 27, built in 1940, is the only historic, Classical Revival style fire station building remaining today in Houston, as well as one of the few remaining examples of civic architecture in Houston dating from the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century. According to Stephen Fox, an architectural historian, “the building is unusual for its domestic scale and for the quality of its architectural detail,” most visible on the front façade. It was designed by Houston architects, Hamilton Brown and Howard E. Westfall.

Hamilton Brown had studied at the prestigious schools of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and at the École des Beaux-Arts, the famous French fine arts college that educated many young American architects in the classical styles. Although mostly known as a modernist, Brown’s design for Fire Station No. 27 show his versatility and thorough understanding of classical styles and proportions, and is reflective of his studies at the École. Brown designed many houses, and the domestic character of his work is reflective in Fire Station No. 27. Brown was active in civic affairs and was a co-founder of the Arts Council of Harris County, Houston Ballet Foundation, the Neighborhood Improvement Council and was one of the concerned citizens that spearheaded the effort for the preservation and development of Old Market Square and Allen’s Landing, two of the most historic sites in downtown Houston.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Fire Station No. 27 was built in the historic Fifth Ward in 1940. According to the Handbook of Texas, “The Fifth Ward, east of downtown Houston, is bounded by Buffalo Bayou on the south, Lockwood Drive on the east, Liberty Road on the north, and Jensen Drive on the west. The site was sparsely inhabited before the Civil War. It was subsequently settled by freedmen and became known as the Fifth Ward in 1866, when an alderman was elected to represent the community in the Houston city government. At the time, half the population was black and half white. By 1870 the population of the ward comprised 561 white and 578 black residents. Two schools, one black and one white, corresponded to the roughly equal segments of the ward’s population in 1876. Mount Vernon United Methodist Church, founded in 1865 by former slave Rev. Toby Gregg, is the oldest institution in the ward. Five other churches are over 100 years old: Pleasant Grove Baptist, Mount Pleasant Baptist, Sloan Memorial United Methodist, Payne Chapel Methodist, and First Shiloh Baptist. The Fifth Ward was also the site of a saloon named for Carry Nation, which, after considerable damage resulting from a dispute with the owner over the name, was subsequently known as the ‘Carnation.’ In the 1880s the ward enjoyed a

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boom following the construction of repair shops for the newly built Southern Pacific Railroad. Growth was interrupted by a fire in 1891 at the Phoenix Lumber Mill and another in 1912, called the ‘Great Fire of 1912’ that burned 119 houses, 116 boxcars, nine oil tanks, thirteen plants, and St. Patrick's Catholic Church and school.”

“Eventually, the Fifth Ward population became predominantly black. At Frenchtown, a four-square-block neighborhood in the ward, 500 blacks of French and Spanish descent from Louisiana organized a community in 1922. Black-owned businesses, including a pharmacy, a dentist's office, an undertaking parlor, a theater, and several barbershops, operated after 1900 on Lyons Avenue and numbered forty by 1925. Working-class blacks were primarily employed within walking distance of the ward; many worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad or at the Houston Ship Channel. Others commuted across town to work as domestics and servants for wealthy Houstonians. By 1927 Phyllis Wheatley High School in the ward, with 2,600 students and sixty teachers, was one of the largest black high schools in America. Other new businesses developed in the 1930s, including printing plants, photography studios, and the Club Matinee, which came to be known as the Cotton Club of the South. Local businessman Grand Duke Crawford organized the Fifth Ward Civic Club.”

“Houston's second housing project for African Americans, the Kelly Court Housing Project, opened after World War II. Early community activists included Lonnie Smith and Lilly Portley. Peacock Records, a black-owned recording company, started in the ward, as did C. F. Smith Electric Company, one of the state's early licensed electrical-contracting companies. Finnigan Park, the second public park for blacks in Houston, opened in the community in the postwar years, and the Julia C. Hester House, a black community center, began service. Nat Q. Henderson, long-time principal of Bruce Elementary School, was the mayor of the Fifth Ward and became known for his leadership.”

“With passage of integration laws in the 1960s, however, many residents left the community seeking wider opportunities. The Fifth Ward is noted for training many prominent athletes. Musicians from the ward include Arnett Cobb, Milton Larkin, and Illinois Jacquet. Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland, members of Congress, graduated from Wheatley High School. In the 1990s efforts were being made to preserve the Houston Place, a seventy-five-year-old gathering center.”

As the Fifth Ward population grew in numbers and with the increase in the number of buildings, the need for more fire services was never more apparent.

According to the “History of the Houston Fire Department” by Max H. McRae, which is included on the Houston Fire Museum, Inc. website, “A bond election approved an expansion of the street fire alarm boxes. Firefighters on the scene communicated with the fire dispatcher either by telephone or fire box to call for more fire equipment. Telephones were not always available. Approximately 400 new alarm boxes were installed in 1940 to cover more of the city. This brought the total number of fire alarm boxes in the city to 820.”

Also three new fire stations would be built to better meet the demands of the Fire Department, including Fire Station No. 27 which was built in 1940 in the Denver Subdivision of the Fifth Ward to serve that community and the surrounding area. It was designed by Hamilton Brown, and according to Stephen Fox, he was assisted by Howard E. Westfall. The Houston City Directory for 1937-1938 only shows a listing for architect, Hamilton Brown, who had his office at 400 Niels Esperson Building, 802-812 Travis Street. Again in the 1943-44 Houston City Directory, there was no listing for Westfall as an architect, but there is a listing for a Howard Westfall living at 3712 Graustark Avenue. Hamilton Brown is listed with his home address as 5409 Palmer, but shown after his name is “USN,” indicating he was serving in the United States Navy at that time. World War II consumed the resources of the United States and the free world during this period of time, but still resources and funds were found in 1940 to construct or relocate new fire stations for the safety of Houstonians, including Fire Station No. 27, Fire Station No. 28 at Berry and Louisiana, and the relocation of Fire Station No. 4 to 4100

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S. Shepherd and Banks. The general contractor for Fire Station No. 27 in 1940 was T. D. Howe Construction Company.

McRae continues to relate that “at the beginning of World War II, an auxiliary fire force of civilians was recruited and trained to replace firefighters being called into military service. The move of Station 4 to southwest of the city had been recommended by fire underwriters. A ladder and district chief were added to the new station. Fire commissioners were out in 1943, after voters approved switching the type of city government from a commission form to a city manager type of government. Later, the city government changed to a mayor-council type. Two-way radios were installed in district chief's cars in 1944 and ended the dependence on street fire alarm boxes to communicate with fire dispatchers.”

After Fire Station No. 27 at 6302 Lyons Avenue had served the Fire Department meeting the needs for fire protection to the community for over 60 years, it came time to replace it when it was determined obsolete due to its size and age, thus no longer meeting the needs today required for fire personnel and equipment to serve the immediate area. A new Fire Station No. 27 was opened in May, 2004 further up Lyons Avenue at 6515 Lyons Avenue at Gazin, and the old Fire Station No. 27 was closed.

The new Fire Station No. 27 was designed by STOA International Architects, Inc. For their design, they took inspiration from many of the historic Houston fire station buildings of the past, most of which have been demolished. The new fire station building exhibits a broad gable front roof which covers a massive archway spanning the two garage door bays for the fire department vehicles. Above the archway is a large, round louvered attic vent. The pedestrian entry door is located just to the left of the paired, garage doors, and it is covered by a metal, cantilevered awning which wraps the corner of the forward bay on the left just beyond the location of the pedestrian entry door. The building also features a high pitched roof with wide eave overhangings.

Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Houston recently visited Fire Station. No. 27, now located at 6515 Lyons Avenue, and there located on the inside wall is the preserved, original plaque for Fire Station No. 27 at 6302 Lyons Avenue. The plaque reads: “Fire Department, City of Houston, Station No. 27 – Erected – A. D. 1940; Mayor – Oscar F. Holcombe – 1939-1940; Mayor - C. A. Pickett – 1941-1942; City Commissioners – Phil Hamburger, Frank E. Mann, Ben Reinicke, J. H. B. House; City Comptroller – W. H. Maunsell; Fire Chief – Homer F. Lyles; Assistant Fire Chief – Geo. W. Richardson; Architects: Hamilton Brown – Howard E. Westfall; General Contractor: T. D. Howe Construction Company.” Scott Mallott restored this plaque and placed it there, being only one of many that have been restored by Mallott.

According to Anna Mod, Preservation consultant, architect Hamilton Brown, who designed Fire Station No. 27, was born in Alameda, California on March 23, 1908 to Herbert Hamilton Brown and Florence Emma (Sharon) Brown. Brown studied at the University of California at Berkeley and received his B.S. in Architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1932. During his study at MIT, he spent a year (1931) at the École des Beaux-Arts, the famous French fine arts college that educated many young American architects in the classical styles.

Hamilton Brown practiced architecture in Houston and is mostly known as a modernist, yet Fire Station No. 27 shows his versatility and thorough understanding of classical styles and proportions. The École influenced a generation of American architects who practiced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Beaux-Arts trained American architects influenced the popularity of the revival styles in the United States during this same period.

By 1937, Hamilton Brown had established his practice, Hamilton Brown & Associates, in Houston, and he had an office at 400 Niels Esperson Building, 802-812 Travis Street (Houston City Directory). According to the Houston AIA Guide by Fox, Brown's principal works with McKim include the First Christian Church (1958) at

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1601 Sunset Boulevard. Another work with Thompson McCleary includes: Macham Building (1959) at 3230 Sul Ross Avenue. Another work by Brown includes: 5000 Longmont Drive #8 and #11 (1962) and some houses at 5008 and 5005 Green Tree (1968). According to Anna Mod, other works by Brown include: Medical Center National Bank (altered), the Junior League of Houston, the Elizabeth L. Ring Branch for the Houston Public Library and numerous Elementary Schools for the Houston Independent School District, including Looscan, Cynthia Ann Parker Elementary, and Houston Garden Elementary (1950-52). A search of the internet also revealed the following works by Brown as well: Chapelwood UMC Sanctuary (1954) at 11140 Greenbay which was one of three U. S. churches recognized in 1955 by the National Church Architecture Association and the American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter. Also with Donald Barthelme, Brown designed the Adams Petroleum Center (1957) at 6910 Fannin Street (demolished - 1996) for which Barthelme and Brown won an AIA award of merit in 1958.

In 1940 Brown was practicing with Howard E. Westfall at least on the design of Fire Station No. 27. According to Stephen Fox, an architectural historian, “the building is unusual for its domestic scale and for the quality of its architectural detail” which is most visible on the front facade. Brown had studied at the prestigious schools of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and at the École des Beaux-Arts, the famous French fine arts college that educated many young American architects in the classical styles. Although mostly known as a modernist, Brown’s design for Fire Station No. 27 shows his versatility and thorough understanding of classical styles and proportions. Brown designed many houses and the domestic character of his work is reflected also in Fire Station No. 27. A year later, Brown also designed the Albert L. Ladner House, at 3362 Del Monte Drive in River Oaks (City of Houston Landmark/Protected Landmark). This Georgian Revival style home, which features metal casement windows, as does Fire Station No. 27, are testaments to their 1940s construction date as well as a testament to Brown’s versatility and thorough understanding of classical styles and proportions, reflective of his studies at the École. In a 1961s article in the Houston Post, the houses Brown had on the drawing board were described as, “unusual and expensive” (Houston Post, July 30, 1961). In the 1960s, Brown’s firm was known as Brown & McKim, AIA, and their offices were in a modern style building at 3270 Sul Ross. Brown was active in civic affairs including a co-founder of the Arts Council of Harris County, Houston Ballet Foundation, the Neighborhood Improvement Council and was one of the concerned citizens that spearheaded the effort for the preservation and development of Old Market Square and Allen’s Landing, two historic sites in downtown Houston (both sites are “Contributing” to the National Register of Historic Places Historic District and the City of Houston Historic District). Brown’s awards include numerous recognitions from the AIA-Houston Chapter and the Texas Society of Architects. His work was published during his lifetime in Architectural Record, House and Garden, House and Home, Texas Architect, and Fortune. He was listed in Who’s Who in America, Who’s Who in Commerce and Industry, Who’s Who in the Southwest and in the Houston Social Register. In 1959 he was made a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

The other Fire Station buildings still extant in Houston, which have been designated as historic landmarks include: Fire Station No. 7 (1899), now the City of Houston Fire Museum at 2325 Milam Street (City of Houston Landmark/Protected Landmark; NR; RTHL); Fire Station No. 14 (1914) at 107 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Houston Heights (City of Houston Landmark/Protected Landmark; NR; RTHL); and Fire Station No. 3 (1903) (private ownership) at 1919 Houston Avenue (City of Houston Landmark); and Fire Station No. 6 (1903), at 1702 Washington Avenue (classified as “contributing” to the Old Sixth Ward National Register Historic District and City of Houston Historic District).

### RESTORATION HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION

Fire Station No. 27 has experienced only an alteration to the type of garage door, and the overall building remains in good condition. The building has been classified as surplus by the City of Houston Fire Department which no longer needs the building as a fire department facility.

*The information and sources for this application were researched and compiled by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston, 713/837-7796 or Randy.Pace@cityofhouston.net.*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Chapelwood UMC website at [http://www.chapelwood.org/about/about\\_history.htm](http://www.chapelwood.org/about/about_history.htm)

City of Houston Fire Department website at <http://www.houston.tx.gov/fire/about/hfd/history.html>

City of Houston Landmark Designation Application for the Albert L. Ladner House, 3362 Del Monte Drive, River Oaks, G. Randle Pace, City of Houston Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, Houston, Texas

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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

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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:

- | <b>S</b>                            | <b>NA</b>                           | <b>S - satisfies</b> | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> | <b>NA - not applicable</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <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 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;   |
| <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.   |

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905;

**OR**

- 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.

**NO PUBLIC COMMENTS – HAHC MEETING ON FEBRUARY 23, 2006**

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**Planning and Development Department**

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends Protected Landmark designation to City Council for City of Houston Fire Station No. 27 at 6302 Lyons Avenue.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends Protected Landmark designation to the Houston Planning Commission for City of Houston Fire Station No.27 at 6302 Lyons Avenue.

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SITE LOCATION MAP  
CITY OF HOUSTON FIRE STATION No. 27  
6302 LYONS AVENUE  
NOT TO SCALE