PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: The Angelo and Lillian Minella House
OWNER: Ben Koush
APPLICANT: Ben Koush
LOCATION: 6328 Brookside Drive – Simms Woods Addition
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IV
HPO FILE NO.: 06PL20
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-13-06
HAHC HEARING DATE: Feb-23-06
PC HEARING: Mar-02-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 12, Block 6, Simms Woods Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic one-story, concrete block residence and concrete block garage.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation for residence and garage.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Minella House is a significant example of modern, residential architecture as it evolved in mid-twentieth century Houston. It is significant because of its unusual all masonry construction, contemporary design by Houston architect, Allen R. Williams, Jr. It is an example of the Century Built Homes, variations on a standark design, of which the Minella House seemed to be most fully resolved. Its owners, Angelo and Lillian Minella, owned and operated a plumbing supply company in the East End for decades.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Lillian and Angelo Minella were originally from the Boston area. Minella worked as a plumber at 366-374 Washington Street in the 1930s in the Brighton Center, Massachusetts commercial area, which had a large Italian-American population.[i] As late as 1942 Angelo and Lillian were listed in the Essex County City Directory as living on Stanwood Avenue in Gloucester, Massachusetts.[ii]

The Minellas probably left for Texas shortly thereafter. They first settled in San Antonio where Minella ran his own business. They next moved to Beaumont where Minella worked as a government inspector in the shipyards where vessels were quickly being built for the war effort. He ran afoul of local ship builders who were used to giving bribes to inspectors to make up for a lack of quality control. According to his daughter, Janet Nolte, his strictness in this matter was his undoing, and the family was practically forced to leave Beaumont by resentful local businessmen.[iii] They then moved to Houston where Minella established a wholesale plumbing supply company.

According the Houston city directories the Minellas were first listed as living in Houston in 1946-47 at 6902 South Harbor Drive, Apartment 2. Lillian, Janet's older sister by eight years, was listed as a college student living at home. In 1948 the city directory listed Minella Plumbing and Heating Supplies at 2210 Lyons Avenue, and the family was living at the same address as the previous year, South Harbor Drive, now named Avenue R. Angelo Minella later relocated the company to a two-story reinforced, concrete framed building at 3100 McKinney Street. This building, notable for its large concrete eagle affixed to the gable with outstretched wings perched on a globe, bears the date of 1920. On the side of the building, facing Palmer Street, one can still see faded letters, indicating "Minella Supply City Sales." Minella's

company appears to have been a fairly prominent Houston institution, and he frequently advertised in the *Houston Post* and the *Houston Chronicle* in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[iv] The debts Minella incurred while gambling in Galveston, Kemah and Richmond in the 1950s were one of the reasons he declared bankruptcy on 23 August 1955.[v] However, he seemed to have recovered sufficiently to continue his business. On 28 February 1973 he was able to take out a small business loan from the Industrial State Bank.[vi]

The 1949 city directory listed the family as living in a house at 5214 Hillman. They moved into the house on Brookside Drive in the Simms Woods subdivision in 1950 according to Janet.[vii] By the time the family moved into the Brookside house, Lillian was no longer living with her parents, and Janet was in her last year of high school. Janet only lived in the house for one year then left to go to college. Angelo and Lillian continued to live in the Brookside house until their deaths in 1982 and 1991 respectively. After that the daughters, citing sentimental attachment, decided to rent the house rather than sell it. It was rented to a variety of tenants over the years until 2004, and when they decided to sell it. Ben Koush bought the house that year and remodeled it for his own habitation.

The Simms Woods subdivision is located in the northeast corner of the Luke Moore League granted by Stephen F. Austin in 1824 about four miles east of present day downtown Houston and one mile south of the Houston Ship Channel. This area of Houston, along South Wayside Drive between Lawndale Avenue and Harrisburg Boulevard, developed rapidly in the first half of the twentieth century due to its location south of the industry along what would become the Houston Ship Channel, but the area was still near the bucolic rolling terrain along Brays Bayou and easily accessible to downtown via streetcar.[viii] During the first four decades of the twentieth century a number of important cultural, social and commercial institutions and developments were located in the immediate area. These included the Houston Country Club, the Forest Hill subdivision, The E. F. Simms estate, The Hughes Tool Company, Forest Park Cemetery, the Villa de Matel, the Idylwood subdivision, the Houston Country Club Place subdivision and the Simms Woods subdivision. Because they acquired sizeable tracts of land for long term use, the area has remained relatively stable and the rate of change has been gradual compared to other sections of the East End.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s a surge of construction activity coincided with the completion of the Gulf Freeway to Wayside Drive in 1951,[ix] which is Texas's oldest freeway. Several significant examples of modern architecture, including the Minella House, were erected at this time. After this date most new development shifted south. The last remnants of the area's genteel origins symbolically disappeared with the removal of the Houston Country Club to far west Houston in 1957. The decades after were a period of slow decline as the middle class inhabitants of Forest Hill, Idylwood, Houston Country Club Place and Simms Woods began to move to more desirable, outlying subdivisions. The East End became almost completely inhabited by Hispanics in the 1970s. What was interesting about the immediate area though is that it still maintains its middle class desirability, albeit with the new Spanish speaking majority, while adjacent residential areas declined.

In 1903 the Houston elite built the first golf course in Houston, the Houston Golf Club on a 45 acre tract along Buffalo Bayou, leased from the Rice Institute. The original nine hole course was on the south side of the bayou west of downtown where today, the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas now stands.[x] In 1908 the club renamed itself the Houston Club and purchased 156 acres of rolling terrain along Brays Bayou, bounded to the west by South Wayside Drive between Capitol Avenue and Lawndale Avenue for a new golf course. The first course on the new site appeared to have had nine holes according the city map of 1913. By the time the city map of 1920 was published, the course showed eighteen holes. Club member

A. W. Pollard was responsible for its design.[xi] The Houston Country Club was accessible from downtown Houston via the Harrisburg streetcar line and members often played a round of golf during lunch breaks.[xii] Prominent early members of the Houston Country Club included, Will C. Hogg, Howard R. Hughes, Jesse H. Jones, Hugo V. Neuhaus, and Ben Taub.[xiii] The original clubhouse, located on the northern section of the property, accessible via an extension of 71st Street, was a rambling two-story, Craftsman style building, designed by Sanguinet & Staats and completed in 1909.[xiv] It was remodeled in 1921 at the behest of Hugo V. Neuhaus, who commissioned New York architect, Harrie T. Lindeberg, to design a splendid swimming pool with pink stucco bath houses and shaded arcades modeled on classical Roman baths along three of its sides.[xv] The clubhouse was again remodeled in 1939, this time to the design of member Kenneth Franzheim.[xvi] Today none of the buildings are extant. In 1957 the Houston Country Club relocated to Tanglewood. Club member Gus Wortham purchased the former location which he renamed the Houston Executive Golf Club.[xvii] In 1973 the city of Houston acquired the course and renamed it Gus Wortham Golf Course in his honor. The existing clubhouse dates to this period.

Partly because of the attraction of the Houston County Club, the area was briefly considered to be a potential location for luxury residential development. In 1910 the Forest Hill subdivision was laid out to the design of Kansas City landscape architect, Sid J. Hare. This subdivision, located directly east of Brays Bayou across from the Houston Country Club, was accessible from Forest Hill Boulevard, which began at Harrisburg Boulevard between 72nd Street and 73rd Street, and proceeded directly south through undeveloped land before it crossed Brays Bayou and entered the subdivision. Forest Hill was notable for its curving street pattern that took the form of concentric arcs. It was the first subdivision in Houston to break from the orthogonal grid street pattern. A few large houses were built in Forest Hill, notably the Colonial revival house designed by Dallas architects, Lang & Witchell at 1766 Pasadena Avenue (1911), and the Mission style bungalow designed by W. A. Cooke for his own habitation at 1724 Alta Vista Avenue (1912).[xviii] Forest Hill never fulfilled its backers' expectations, as it could not compete with the development along south Main Street that included Rice University, planned in 1909, and the Shadyside subdivision of 1916. The majority of the existing houses date from second half of the 1940s when the large 1-acre properties were reduced in size and redeveloped.[xix]

Colonel Edward F. Simms, a Kentuckian who made his fortune in the oil fields of Texas and Louisiana in the first decades of the twentieth century, eventually settled in Houston. Sometime after 1910 he purchased several tracts of land adjacent the west side of the Houston Country Club along what would become South Wayside Drive. According to Marguerite Johnston,

> *…he built a mansion with a library, living room, dining room, and a breakfast room, on the first floor, a maid's room off the kitchen, a wine cellar and furnace in the basement, and seven bedrooms and five bathrooms on the upper floors, as well as a big upstairs sleeping porch. He built gardens, stables, greenhouse, reflecting pools, lakes and one of Houston's first swimming pools-a big one set some distance from the house. The estate required eight gardeners and five house servants to maintain. He called it Wayside.*[xx]

The stucco clad main house at 900 South Wayside Drive, whose architect is unknown, was accessible by a winding gravel drive. The Sanborn's Fire Insurance Co. maps, which were last updated in 1969, showed several additional smaller houses, the extensive collection of outbuildings and irregularly shaped concrete swimming pool which was designed to look like a pond located to the south and west of the main house. The draftsman noted in the last edition of the Sanborn that all buildings were vacant.[xxi] Simms's step-daughter, Bessie, married architect Kenneth Franzheim, whose office designed most of the large important commercial buildings in Houston from the 1930s through the 1950s. During the years the Franzheims were

in residence at Wayside, it was often the scene of prominent social gatherings. In March 1949, for example, during the American Institute of Architects' national convention in Houston, Bessie entertained a delegation of the wives of architects from Cuba and Mexico at the house.[xxii] Over the years the family sold parcels of the estate, notably the southern sections along Lawndale Avenue that would become the Houston Country Club Place subdivision and the Simms Woods subdivision. At its peak from the 1920s through the 1940s, the Simms estate was one of the largest, most elaborate residential compounds in Houston.

The giant Hughes Tool Company was founded in Houston 1909 by ex-Spindletop well drillers, Howard R. Hughes and Walter B. Sharp, as the Sharp-Hughes Company in order to develop new roller cutting bits to penetrate stone. In 1917 Hughes bought out his partner's half of the company and relocated to the East End. Shortly thereafter the company entered a period of great expansion. At its peak, the Hughes Tool Company industrial complex in the East End encompassed the land between Polk Avenue, Hughes Street, the Evergreen Cemetery and Capitol Avenue with its entrance at 300 Hughes near Slaughterpen Bayou.[xxiii] Several notable buildings remain, such as the former, International Derrick and Equipment of Texas Co. building (1930) and 1944-45 at 5425 Polk. This polychrome exercise in Moderne architecture was rehabilitated by the City of Houston for city government offices. Due to increased production at the Hughes Tool Company during World War II, William G. Farrington built the Lawndale Village Apartments in 1944 on the 7000 block of Lawndale Avenue at the southeast corner of Forest Hill. Because steel was unavailable, the foundations of these two story garden apartments were made of extra thick concrete with no reinforcement. The exterior walls were made of unglazed cream and glazed yellow ceramic tiles. The interior walls were also made of ceramic tiles covered in plaster.[xxiv] They are a good example of high quality site planning, architectural design and construction of multi-family residential projects constructed during this era. Howard R. Hughes, Jr., who inherited ownership of the company at his father's death in 1924, and who was well known for eccentric schemes, began an interesting side company at the behest of R. C. Kuldell, the president of the company, the Gulf Brewing Company in 1933, once Prohibition ended. The brewing plant located at 5301-3 Polk Avenue produced Grand Prize beer until 1963. Belgian born brew meister, Franz H. Brogniez, vice president in charge of production at Gulf Brewing Co. and father of noted Houston architect Raymond H. Brogniez, designed the layout for a large warehouse and bottling plant in 1946 from which architectural drawings were prepared by Lloyd & Morgan. The new plant, capable of handling 660,000 bottles a day, was described in the *Houston Post* as a "model of the newest and most efficient brewing and bottling operations."[xxv] The building, clad in corrugated asbestos panels and brick veneer, was located in the north east sector of the complex facing Capitol Avenue. Today it is partially used and in a state of advanced disrepair. In 1987 Hughes Tool Company merged with Baker International and is now known as Baker Hughes. It is the third-largest well services company in the world after Halliburton and Schlumberger.[xxvi] Baker Hughes has since reconfigured the complex as the Central City Industrial Park and now leases their old buildings to a variety of smaller industrial manufacturing concerns.

In 1922 Forest Park Cemetery was created on 49 acres of land carved out of the moribund Forest Hill subdivision along Brays Bayou. Between 1930 and 1950 it was expanded to the south across Lawndale Avenue and today comprises 350 acres with 127,000 burials.xxvii Its designer was probably Hare & Hare. Sid J. Hare, who began the firm in 1910 and was joined in partnership with his son S. Herbert Hare, was a noted expert on cemetery design and had served as the superintendent of Forest Hill Cemetery in Kansas City from 1896 to 1902.[xxviii] The neo-Gothic limestone clad, reinforced concrete framed Abbey Mausoleum was built in 1928. The wings to the north and south of it are later unsympathetic additions. The contemporary Funeral Home in the new section of the cemetery was built in 1963. Notable Houstonians buried at Forest Park Cemetery include, Neils and Mellie Esperson, Jesse H. Jones, John W. Neal, co-founder of Maxwell House Coffee, and axe-murderer Carla Fay Tucker.

In 1927 the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word moved from Galveston, where they had been located since 1867, to 70 acres of forested land south of Lawndale Avenue and east of South Wayside Drive.[xxix] Maurice J. Sullivan was commissioned to design the order's new motherhouse, novitiate, administrative buildings and chapel at 6510 Lawndale Avenue. According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Conventual Chapel "is the grandest church built in Houston during the 1920s. It is detailed with neo-Byzantine décor. Sullivan employed exposed aggregate concrete mosaic for the wall surfaces and Guastavino tile vaults for the chapel's ceiling. Numerous varieties of polished and colored marbles are used. Sullivan designed the stained glass windows, which were fabricated in Munich."[xxx] These buildings remain in good condition today. In 1946 the convent planned to build a six story hospital on the grounds immediately east of the Conventual Chapel. I. E. Loveless of Beverly Hills was the architect of the late Moderne reinforced concrete, brick faced building, which was intended to "permit the maximum amount of sunshine and fresh air for every room."[xxxi] It was never built, however. Instead the Sisters, who had previously commissioned Loveless to design the Moderne, St. Joseph's Hospital Maternity and Children's Building (1938) at 1902-1920 La Branch, had him also design the Moderne, St. Joseph Hospital Pediatrics Wing (demolished) at 1401 Pierce Avenue in 1948.

After the collapse of the Forest Hill development, little residential activity took place in the immediate area. To the north between Harrisburg Boulevard and Buffalo Bayou, were the Magnolia Park Addition of 1909 and the Central Park Addition of 1912.[xxxii] Here a large number of very modest dwellings, intended for Houston Ship Channel workers, were built in the 1910s and 1920s. Large scale residential construction did not resume south of Harrisburg Boulevard until 1928, when the Hare & Hare designed Idylwood subdivision, was developed by John A. Embry directly south of the Houston Country Club. Idylwood, with its streets sensitively responding to the undulating topography of Brays Bayou, which forms its eastern border, was designed for middle class professionals who managed the industrial operations of the Ship Channel. It was a relatively large development of 319 houses. However the effects of the Depression hindered construction. Most of its houses date from the later 1930s through the 1940s. Early advertising brochures described Idylwood as "Houston's East End Residential Park."[xxxiii] The multiple entrances to the subdivision along South Wayside Drive are marked with rustic stone walls, thus setting it off from the surrounding neighborhoods. Several notable early modern houses were built in Idylwood. The Lawler House (1937) at 6653 Wildwood Street was designed by Swenson, Heidbreder & Bush and was made of Vibrex Tile. This material that was described in the *Houston Post* on 11 April 1937, when the house was opened to the public, as "absolutely waterproof, completely fireproof, lightweight, exceedingly strong, varied textures adaptable to architectural detail and unlimited colors." This type of home is not to be confused with the concrete block type of construction."[xxxiv] The original furnishings by H. J. Cohn Furniture Company were to be "the latest designs in modern furniture."[xxxv] The Lroy House (1940) at 6748 Meadowlawn was designed by Harry A. Turner. This home is a two-story Moderne extravaganza. The interiors still possess a wonderful mural painted on plaster of magnolia blossoms and a fallout shelter installed in the 1960s.

The Houston Country Club Place subdivision was begun in 1941 by developer C. E. King. The 49 acres King purchased from the Simms heirs at the corner of Lawndale Avenue and Wayside Drive constituted about half the Simms parcel.[xxxvi] The street plan comprised long, gently curving east-west oriented blocks reminiscent of such interwar subdivisions in Houston as Garden Oaks. The main entrance to Houston Country Club Place was at Villa De Matel Road and Lawndale Avenue. It was marked by two matching monumental, red brick gate piers. The two houses on either side used the same brick veneer and together with the gates, made an unusually impressive architectural statement for a modest subdivision. The western gate collapsed in 1999 when a water main under it burst which was not turned off until several days later. The second gate was in danger of collapse, but due to the diligent efforts of the Houston

Country Club Place Civic Club, was stabilized and repaired in 2005.[xxxvii] Development in Houston Country Club Place was delayed due to the outbreak of World War II and most of the houses there date to the immediate postwar years.

The small, 20-acre, 47 house Simms Woods subdivision was developed in 1946 by R. S. Collins, president of the Texestate Corporation. Its streets connect directly with those of the adjacent Houston Country Club Place, and most visitors fail to realize they are two separate developments. Simms Woods would be an unremarkable postwar subdivision were it not for several architect-designed houses built along Brookside Drive. William N. Floyd designed some of the earliest houses of his career in Simms Woods. The brick veneer Sharp House at 6327 Brookside Drive which he designed, was one of first six houses to be built in the subdivision.[xxxviii] Floyd would later make a name for himself as the Houston equivalent of progressive, California developer Joseph Eichler, for his involvement in several Memorial area subdivisions from the mid 1950s, in which there were large concentrations of modern and contemporary houses. Phillip G. Willard was one of the most prolific contemporary architects in Houston in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He first practiced in Fort Worth and came to Houston sometime in the 1940s.xxxix He associated himself during his Houston years with Lucian T. Hood, Jr., a 1952 graduate of the University of Houston architecture program. According to an article in the *Houston Chronicle* from 20 August 1950, Willard and Hood's "distinctive" Miller House (1951) at 6315 Brookside Drive was

> *…planned to be built entirely of masonry materials throughout its structural frame, employing the use of cavity walls, tile partitions and joistile ceiling and roof structure. The cavity wall is of 4-inch face brick and 4-inch tile, with two inches of air space in the center. The roof is insulated with rigid fiberglass insulation board before the finished roofing is applied. The design employs large plate glass openings, one-way pitched ceilings, cove lighting and the latest in electrical appliances and air conditioning.*[xl]

The third architect associated with Simms Woods was Allen R. Williams, Jr., who designed the Minella House at 6328 Brookside Drive, the subject of this application.

Simms Woods and Houston Country Club place were also unusual in that they quickly became a closely knit Italian-American ethnic enclave. About 60 of the 156 houses in Houston County Club Place were owned by descendents of Italian immigrants, and many of these families built large houses on corner double lots in both subdivisions, dubbed "Italian houses" by local residents.[xli] This was probably a factor in the Minella's decision to build their house in Simms Woods in 1950.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s there was substantial commercial development on the blocks around the intersection of South Wayside Drive and Harrisburg Boulevard between the working class subdivisions to the north and the middle class subdivisions to the south. Sears & Roebuck Co. hired Kenneth Franzheim to design a new store and auto service station on the block bounded by Harrisburg Boulevard, South Wayside Drive, Capitol Avenue and 69th Street, which was completed in 1947. This building shared many traits with Franzheim's better known buildings from late 1940 through the 1950s, such as the Foley's department store (1947) at 1100 Main Street, the Prudential Building at 1100 Holcombe Boulevard (1952), the San Jacinto Building (1952) at 822 Main Street (Demolished), and the Bank of the Southwest Building (1956) at 910 Travis Street. While the formal design of these buildings was retardataire, they were remarkable for the way that Franzheim and his designers ingeniously accommodated complex programs using the latest technology and exceptional tectonic detailing. Geoffrey Baker and Bruno Furnaro described the parking system for the Wayside Drive Sears building in their book *Shopping Centers, Design and Operation* of 1951 as having:

> *…a controller high up on the store to oversee the whole parking area. When one-way aisles (with 60° stalls) are as long as this, it becomes exceedingly difficult for the arriving motorist to see from one end if there is an empty stall. So at the entrance of each aisle is a traffic light managed by the controller. As long as there is a single empty stall in the aisle the light at its end will show a green arrow. When the aisle is full the controller will switch that light to red. Were it not for this control it would scarcely be feasible to economize in space by emptying the aisles directly on to a public street, instead of having a service road with the site.*[xlii]

The building is no longer extant. When the Industrial State Bank by MacKie & Kamrath at 6756 Capitol Avenue opened diagonally across the street from the Wayside Sears store, the *Houston Post* noted on 29 May 1949 that it was "said to be one of the most modern banking buildings in the United States."[xliii] The steel framed, brick clad building was distinguished by its drive-in banking windows facing the parking lot which were protected by a five foot cantilevered concrete overhang. The saw tooth arrangement of the teller cages inside simplified standing in line.[xliv] Today the bank has been altered almost beyond recognition. At 200 North Wayside Drive, two blocks past the Wayside Sears, George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce designed the Weisenthal Clinic of 1949. The front wall and planting box of this charming building were made of Arizona pink ledge stone veneer, and the side and rear walls were clad in corrugated asbestos panels.[xlv] It appears to be in relatively good condition today, except for the incongruous faux stained glass front door and scalloped shingles in some of the window openings.

An early office park prototype development with seventeen properties, Supply Row Center, was laid out by the Texestate Corporation about the same time as Simms Woods subdivision along Supply Row. It was located between Polk Avenue, South Wayside Drive, Capitol Avenue, and Hughes Street close, but not directly accessible, to the Hughes Tool Company complex. Today it contains a collection of substantial modernist commercial buildings in various states of repair which house a variety of small businesses. A good example was the Bettis Corporation Building (1948) at 320 South 66th Street, built by the Texestate Corporation to the designs of an unknown architect.[xlvi]

Below Harrisburg Boulevard between the Simms estate and Houston Country Club Place, Lloyd & Morgan designed the Parker Memorial Methodist Church at 960 South Wayside Drive (1949). William Ward Watkin in his book, *Planning and Building the Modern Church* (1951), described this $40,000 church thus "It seems to have all the simpleness of form that was characteristic of the Colonial types, yet it is definitely a modern design."[xlvii] Over the years the congregation shrank and finally abandoned the church in 1984. It was later sold to the Houston Independent School District, which demolished it to make way for the postmodern Edna M. Carillo Elementary School of 1993.[xlviii] In 1955 an unknown architect designed the shopping center at 6525 Lawndale Avenue that contains the Dinner Bell Cafeteria. A true East End establishment, it has been in continuous operation for over 50 years. The design of this restaurant and adjacent shops is quite sophisticated. The end closest to Lawndale exhibits a pink brick veneer which is laid in a stack bond and incorporates integrated planters and narrow clerestory windows under a large overhang with a raked fascia. This remaining section of the building gives an idea of how the entire center must have originally looked. The interiors of the Dinner Bell are of interest as well.

In the 1960s and 1970s the area entered a period of decline and several large apartment complexes were built on land purchased from the former Simms estate north of Houston Country Club Place. The Royal Wayside Apartments (1963) at 1010 South Wayside Drive and the Lawndale Gardens Apartments (1975) at 910 Fairoaks Drive are a series of two-story, brick veneer tenement barracks. When compared to William G. Farrington's tree shaded Lawndale Village Apartments (1944), it is apparent how much architectural design sensitivity was lost over the three decades that separate them. The one positive event that occurred

in the area during the 1970s was the cancellation of the ill-conceived Harrisburg Freeway. In 1969 the Texas Transportation Commission accepted the Houston City Planning Commission's 1960 proposal for a new freeway to connect the La Port Freeway to the Central Business District Loop (US 59). Community activist Richard Holgin led a seemingly quixotic fight against the city and TxDOT to stop an unnecessary freeway from decimating the low income Hispanic neighborhoods along the Harrisburg corridor. He was aided in a great part by a TxDOT funding crisis brought about by the negative economic consequences of the Arab oil embargo of 1973. In 1976 the Harrisburg Freeway was officially suspended, and in 1992 it was at last deleted from the City of Houston's *Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan.*[xlix] Thus the East End was spared the disastrous effects of freeway construction that previously decimated the Second Ward and Fifth Ward as the East Freeway (US 59) plowed through in the 1960s, and likewise the Riverside Terrace area through the 1970s and 1980s as the South Freeway (US 59) was built. Today, Harrisburg Boulevard retains many of its old buildings, though altered, and is an active Hispanic commercial corridor.

Allen R. Williams, Jr., who designed the Minella House at 6328 Brookside Drive, seems to have shunned publicity, as he did not respond to the queries for information about his practice from the American Institute of Architects *American Architects Directory* of 1955, 1962 or 1970. According to his wife, Thesalone Williams, he graduated from the school of architecture at the University of Texas and came to Houston in 1946.[l] His Texas architectural registration number was 1031, and he was first listed in the Houston city directory in 1946-47 as an architect living and working at 1329 West Pierce Avenue. He became a member of the American Institute of Architects in 1948. From 1949 to 1952, he appeared to have worked and lived at 5110 South Shepherd Drive. In 1953, he was listed as a partner in a firm called Williams & Reed with Mack G. Reed, a Rice Institute graduate of 1949, who had worked for him for the previous two years. Their office was at 2115 Norfolk Street. This partnership lasted until 1954 after which Williams worked alone for the remainder of his career. Williams continued to work at the Norfolk address and live at the Shepherd address until 1958 when he moved his office to 1200 Bissonnet Avenue. That same year he moved his residence to the house he designed at 4603 Ivanhoe Street in the Afton Oaks subdivision. In 1960 he moved his office to 3805 Sandman Street. According to Mrs. Williams he worked with such Houston architects as Cameron Fairchild and Staub, Rather & Howze on certain larger projects, some of which were in the Texas Medical Center. He also worked extensively for such subdivision developers as Roy Harris for whom he designed "hundreds" of houses in the Ripple Creek subdivision, Tynewood subdivision, and others.[li] He died in 1978.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he devised a scheme for standardized all masonry houses that he termed the "Century Built Home." His other work seems to have been more conventional. In 1951 he designed about fifteen houses in the Lamar Weslayan subdivision for developer W. E. Keep. These relatively costly $25,000 houses were described in the *Houston Chronicle* on 25 November 1951 as "…bungalow-type homes with many ranch features" and were the result of "scientific planning from floor layout to exterior designs."[lii] The rendering that accompanied the article depicted a one-story house with hipped roof and shingle siding. The main feature of the front façade was an oversized stone clad chimney. The other buildings with which he was associated was his own house at 4603 Ivanhoe Street (1958). This expansive two-story house was clad with light brown brick veneer and wood board and batten siding. Its most arresting features include: its large sloping roof, covered with brown pressed aluminum shingles that descended to within a few feet of the ground at the entry and its stall, lozenge shaped brick chimney. The L-shaped building faced Ivanhoe Street and had a porte cochere with quarters above facing Kettering Drive. The Williams House is an idiosyncratic yet compelling mixture of the conventional 1950s ranch house, the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Spanish influenced architecture of the American southwest. According to his wife, Williams thought of it as a family compound.liii The house's current owners maintain it in excellent condition.

The Century Built Home, one of which is the Minella Home, was representative of a an intriguing, though ultimately futile, effort on the part of a group of progressive modern architects and builders to reform American residential construction in the immediate postwar years. This desire seemed at first to be an echo of similar proposals from the Depression years when innumerable schemes were presented in national architecture magazines for rationalized construction techniques using such new materials as steel frames and such new methods as prefabrication. However, there were several differences. During the postwar years, after American industrial mobilization for the war effort had led to such impressive results, there was a pervasive sense that similar results could be achieved on the domestic front. The technologically advanced "House of 194X" was a popular trope that appeared over and over in the architectural press. Another difference was the extent to which this concern pervaded the entire country, not just the architectural hot beds of the Northeastern U.S. and California, as it appeared to be during the 1930s. In Houston, a provincial city in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a large number of schemes were presented in the local newspapers describing the work of Houston architects and businessmen to develop new residential construction techniques and companies to promote them. A third difference was the pragmatic approach that postwar architects took, in contrast to the hard-line stance the most prominent prewar modern architects followed. Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House project of 1928, a circular metal house suspended off the ground on a large hollow mast containing a utility core, was such a ruthlessly logical application of technology that its final result was completely alien and unacceptable to the general audience for which it was intended. In comparison, the more conservative architectural design of the Century Built Home revealed a realistic attempt to accommodate American middle class desires, albeit with an improved and unconventional product.

In Houston during these years there were many architects involved in schemes predicated on the use of load bearing masonry walls for residential construction. Phillip G. Willard and Lucian T Hood seem to have been the most prolific. They built a number of contemporary houses, such as the Miller House between 1945 and 1952, under the auspices of the Ceramic Construction Company. The use of the word ceramic indicated that they were using a baked clay product, such as those available from the Clay Products Association of the Southwest. Anthony Luciano, a native of Italy who "did advanced study in concrete in Naples," designed several projects using a variety of masonry schemes in the early 1950s.[liv] Dunaway & Jones designed a house in MacGregor Terrace using a "cellular concrete" system in 1950.[lv] Thomas E. Greacen II designed the Tucker House at Post Oak Land and Lone Star Drive of 1952 that used a "chemical process in the concrete [that] creates bubbles and produces lightweight material with insulating quality."[lvi] Finally Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson designed the Emerson House (1955) at 33 Saddlebrook Drive (demolished) with walls made of three inch thick Styrofoam planks sprayed on each side with one inch of concrete.[lvii] In addition to these architecturally distinguished houses, there were a larger number of conventional houses, such as the house at 1003 Hackney Drive, around the corner from the Minella House, that was advertised in by Black Brollier, a Houston based manufacturer of lightweight concrete tile in the *Houston Post* on 4 January 1948.[lviii]

The most commonly cited reason for the use of masonry systems was that they were fire proof. Other positive characteristics were its permanence, durability, and ability to deter rats and termites. For modern architects, drilled in the necessity of honesty of materials, that fact that masonry could be left exposed or simply painted rather than requiring a second layer of cladding was another reason for its appeal. According to an article that appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* about the Sarf House, the only Century Built Home to be published, Allen Williams expressed a desire to "reveal the natural colors and textures of the materials used."[lix]

It was unusual how this group of Houston modern architects would be interested in masonry building systems, when in the architectural press, the systems that received the most coverage were those based on lightweight steel frames. The best example being the iconic Eames House (1949) in Los Angeles, designed by Charles and Ray Eames, for their own use under the aegis of the *Arts & Architecture* Case Study House Program. The airy Eames House, with its visually complex web of thin steel members, presented nearly the opposite appearance of these substantial low set Houston houses. These Houston architects were also notable for their concerns with climatic adaptation in design. Many of their projects from these years also included references to proper cardinal orientation for the Houston region and provisions for such things as sun shading and cross ventilation. The most publicized Houston modern architects of the 1950s were those working in the patrician Mieisan mode.[lx] Houston's well known Miesian architects produced buildings where formal design was in the foreground, sometimes as the expense of construction and climatic considerations. This suggests that this forgotten group architects were trying to create a regional modern architecture for Houston, focusing on durable construction methods and designs that took into account the unique geographical characteristics of the upper Gulf Coast and treating formal and stylistic concerns as secondary.

How Williams devised the scheme for the Century Built Home is unknown. Also unknown was the extent to which he had backing from one or more of the developers he was working with in the late 1940s and early 1950s. There was a construction company, Century Builders, whose name and phone number appeared on a large painted sign that appeared at the Minella House as it was being built as well as also appearing in the newspaper article describing the Sarf House.[lxi] Century Builders, however, was never listed in the Houston city directory during the years the Century Built Homes were built.

The premise of the Century Built Home was the use of a 12 inch by 8 inch by 5 inch lightweight hollow concrete wall tile set on a four inch thick reinforced concrete slab foundation with a continuous two foot two inch by ten inch grade beam and twelve inch diameter bell bottom drilled piers eight feet on center for walls and a system of 2 foot wide by 2 1/2 inch thick lightweight reinforced concrete slabs for the roof. Exterior walls were painted. Vertical joints were flush and horizontal joints raked to create a horizontal linear emphasis. Interior walls and ceiling were covered with a one inch layer of cement plaster. The built roof covered with coal tar and light colored gravel was set over a 3/4 inch fiberglass insulating board on top of the concrete structure. Windows were standard metal casements with 12 inch by 16 inch 1/8 inch thick glass panes. Doors and casings were standard sizes and made of wood. The flooring was a combination of 9 inch by 9 inch by 5/8 inch oak veneer tongue and groove parquet in the living and sleeping areas, 12 inch by 12 inch asphalt tile in the kitchen, and thin set 3 inch hexagonal glazed ceramic tile in the bathrooms. The wood veneer parquet and asphalt tile were directly attached to the concrete slab with black mastic. Electrical wiring was run through metal conduit embedded in the center of the walls. The house had central heat supplied to the rooms through a main trunk line run along the ceiling of the central corridor concealed by a furred down ceiling. The house was not air conditioned. It did have a 36 inch diameter attic fan at the end of the corridor nearest the bed rooms with automatic ceiling shutter aluminum vanes and a large painted steel monitor with leak proof ventilation louvers above. Kitchen cabinetry was made of pressed steel by Youngstown Kitchens with countertops of Consoweld, a sheet good product glued to a substrate similar to linoleum.

According to Janet Nolte, her father, Angelo Minella, first saw a Century Built home being erected in Garden Oaks. The home was the Pickens House at 851 West 43rd Street, built in the late 1940s. After numerous Sunday afternoon inspections with family in tow, Minella decided to hire, Allen R. Williams, Jr., the architect of the Pickens House, to design one as his own residence in Simms Woods.[lxii] A third Century Built Home was erected for Carl Stallworth at 6648 Merry Lane in Idylwood in 1951. According to

Stallworth, who still lives in the house, there was a fourth Century Built Home off Campbell Road north of Old Katy Road that he saw when it was open to the public.[lxiii] This house is no longer extant and its exact address is unknown. A fifth Century Built Home was the Sarf House (1950), planned for the corner of Tangley Street and Rutgers Street in West University. It seemed not to have been built as Sarf was never listed in the city directory at that address.

The Century Built Homes were variations on a standard design, of which the Minella House seemed to be the most fully resolved. The plan of the Minella House had a living-dining room at the front of the house facing north. Along its east side was a sun porch that was glazed on three sides. To the west was the kitchen with its own exterior door and stoop. A corridor, beginning at the rear of the living-dining room, led to a bathroom, two small bedrooms and a larger master bedroom with its own bathroom, which included a rear exit door. The plan of the Sarf House and the Stallworth House were both very similar to that of the Minella House. All of the Century Built Homes had large Roman brick clad front chimneys with built in planter boxes and Roman brick cladding on the interior around the fireplace. The living area in each was covered with a tall shed roof and that of the kitchen, sleeping areas and bathrooms, was covered by a lower flat roof. The roof had a three foot overhang. On the Minella House the overhang varied according to location. At the west wall of the master bedroom, where there were no windows, and on the north façade for example, the overhang was cut back to one foot. The garage of all of the houses, except the Stallworth House, was detached and located at the rear of the property. Because the Stallworth House was on a smaller lot, its garage was located at the front of the house and connected to it with short covered breezeway. Both the Minella and the Stallworth House had similar plumbing fixtures and kitchen cabinetry. All the houses had metal casement windows. None of the houses had central air-conditioning. The cost of the Century Built Homes appeared to be moderate. The approximate construction cost of the Sarf House was listed at $11,000. At the time, the equivalent wood frame houses in Oak Forest, Houston's largest early postwar subdivision, were selling for about $9,000. Although the architectural design of the Century Built Home was modern, both the Minellas and the Stallworths, furnished their houses with conventional furniture and interior decorations. This suggested that the masonry construction of the house was its most appealing feature to them, not its architectural design. The owners of the Century Built Homes seemed to have all worked in the technical and industrial fields and doubtlessly would have appreciated such a building.[lxiv]

RESTORATION HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION

When Ben Koush bought the Minella House in 2004, it was relatively unchanged from its original state. The Minellas made almost no changes to the house while they lived in it. When the house was rented, the rental agency occasionally made repairs to tenant inflicted damage but these were minimally invasive. The greatest damage to the house was when a tenant set a fire in the wood framed closets separating the two smaller bedrooms. According to Janet, smoke ruined the finish of the wood parquet and they replaced it with beige vinyl composition tile. One of the closets had to be rebuilt as well. The other major change to the house was the addition of window air conditioners. They were cut into the windows at one of the smaller bedrooms, the master bedroom, and the living-dining room. A fourth air conditioner was installed in a hole cut in the wall of the sun porch. Metal conduit with supplemental electrical lines were screwed to the exterior walls of the house to supply power to these air conditioners. The louvers of the attic fan were removed at this time and the opening covered with a piece of plywood.

Koush undertook a series of repairs and improvements to the house during the summer of 2004. He retained as much of the remaining original undamaged materials and fittings as possible and installed new elements that compliment its architectural design. He removed individual air conditioning units and

installed central air conditioning. As the original non-insulated heating ducts were unsuitable for air conditioning, because they would have sweated excessively, he removed the soffits concealing them in the corridor and kitchen to make space for the new larger insulated ductwork which he left exposed. Between the living-dining room and the sun porch he enlarged the opening, which he framed with exposed white painted steel beams, to allow conditioned air to reach the sun porch. He removed the vinyl composition tile, the remaining oak veneer parquet floor in the living-dining room, which had water damage from a leaking chimney cap, as well as the asphalt tiles in the kitchen, which were warping and coming up from the floor. He installed ostrich gray slate tile in a decorative pattern everywhere except in the bathrooms, where the original ceramic tile was still in good condition. In the kitchen, he removed the original Consoweld countertops and substrate, which has become warped from water damage, and replaced it with bright red WilsonArt plastic laminate countertops to match a color image from the 1953 book *House & Garden's Complete Guide to Interior Decoration*, depicting a kitchen in tones of "warm terra cotta and dove gray…to avoid the clinical, enamel-hard look."[lxv] He painted the exterior walls of the house and garage white and the exterior doors bright orange, as seen in a color photograph of a similar house, the Fisher House (1950), designed by J. Herschel Fisher in Dallas, that appeared in *McCall's Book Of Modern Houses* of 1951.[lxvi] The remainder of his work consisted of repairs to roof flashing, repairing damaged windows, removing extra electrical conduit, patching walls, and installing a new concrete driveway with a grass median, depicted on Williams' architectural drawings.

The happy fate of the Minella House represents a story that occurs much too rarely in Houston, a city characterized by ruthless economic speculation. Part of the reason for the house's survival was its location. This section of Houston has been buffered by a variety of relatively large, long lasting commercial and institutional developments interspersed with comparatively small middle-class residential subdivisions. The size and scale of these heterogeneous developments were important to their longevity. They were not so small that they would be overwhelmed as demographics changed, nor were they so large that once the area started to change in the 1970s, large areas could become blighted. These residential subdivisions were small enough that residents felt a sense of solidarity and commitment even as surrounding areas declined. Driving along South Wayside Drive between Lawndale Avenue and Harrisburg Boulevard, one notices the pleasant, suburban atmosphere: large areas of greenery at the Villa De Matel, the series of stone gates at Idylwood, the fairways of the former Houston Country Club, the large Willow Oaks of Houston Country Club Place and the remnants of the commercial development once limited to the blocks around the intersection of Harrisburg Boulevard and South Wayside Drive. This coherence is notable in a city where most of the urban field is a disorganized patchwork of incompatible uses. As such it presents an effective model of urban development in a suburban automobile centered city.

In a city where developers are the ultimate arbiters of taste, this area has benefited doubly. Not only was the planning of the developments superior, but it supported a collection of distinguished examples of conventional and modern architectural design that was almost unparalleled in Houston. The modern design of the Minella House by Allen R. Williams, Jr., in Simms Woods subdivision is a good example. The Minella House is an important example of a development of modern architecture in Houston where a now forgotten group of architects simultaneously tried to reform conventional suburban building practices and infuse even the most modest houses with a sense of place and permanence. As such, it too should be a model for future architecture in Houston.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, and edited by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston, 713-837-7796 or Randy.Pace@cityofhoustson.net.

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
☑	☐	(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;
☐	☑	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
☐	☑	(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;
☑	☐	(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;
☑	☐	(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.

OR

☐	☑	The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

☑ ☐ The property is PENDING being 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

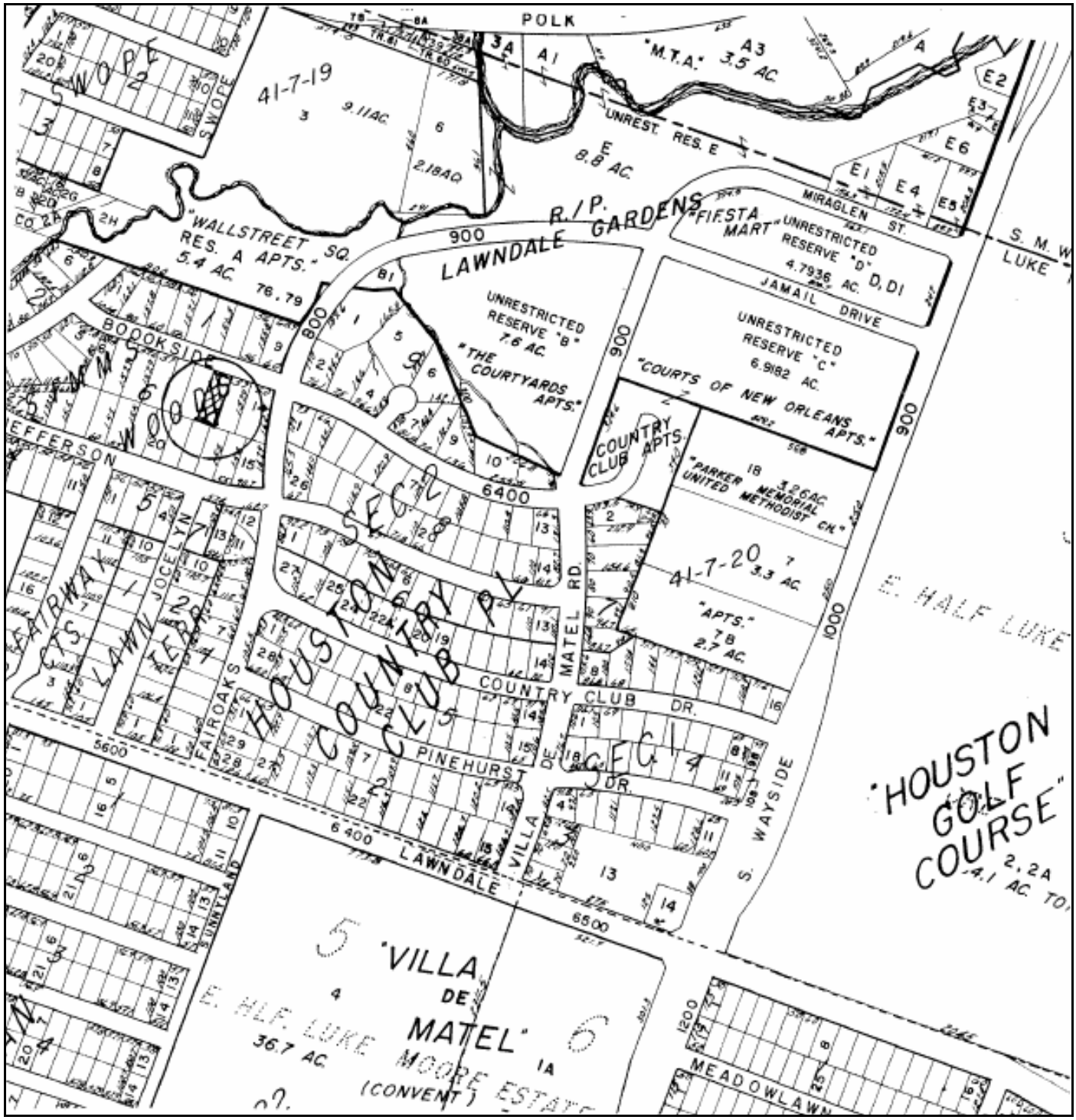
☐ ☑ The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

NO PUBLIC COMMENTS – HAHC MEETING ON FEBRUARY 23, 2006

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend Protected Landmark designation to City Council for the Angelo and Lillian Minella House at 6328 Brookside Drive.

SITE LOCATION MAP
ANGELO AND LILLIAN MINELLA HOUSE
6328 BROOKSIDE DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE



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