

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**LANDMARK NAME:** Cox-Ewing House**OWNER:** Virginia and John Kirby Ewing**APPLICANT:** Same as Owner**LOCATION:** 1508 Kirby Drive – River Oaks**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A**AGENDA ITEM:** II**HPO FILE NO:** 07L171**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jan-21-2007**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Feb-14-2007**PC HEARING DATE:** Mar-01-2007

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 11, Block 33, River Oaks Section 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic, two-story brick residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The home at 1508 Kirby Drive was originally built for Edward A. Cox. The home was constructed in 1938 and was designed by recognized Houston architects, Stayton Nunn and Milton McGinty. The body of work created by Nunn and McGinty is substantial and includes the original iconic River Oaks Community Center (River Oaks Shopping Center), parts of Methodist Hospital and the Depelchin Faith Home. The home has been owned and occupied by Virginia and John Kirby Ewing, prominent Houstonians, for many years. The home was the subject of a feature article in the November 1981 issue of *Vogue-Mexico*. The house qualifies for Landmark Designation under criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Notable Houston architects, Stayton Nunn and Milton McGinty, designed the house at 1508 Kirby Drive in 1938 for Edward Arthur Cox. Mr. Cox (1883-1969) was born in Ohio, and lived in Houston from 1927 until his death. He was a senior partner with Cox and Blackburn, a wholesale appliance distributor. According to the City Directory, the firm was located in the Esperson Building in 1952. Mr. Cox was active in the Houston community and belonged to numerous social organizations, including the River Oaks Country Club, various Masonic bodies, and the Shriners. After Mr. Cox's death, his wife, Josephine G. Cox (1892-1976) continued to live in the home and ultimately passed it on to her daughter, Margery Cox Lee.

In 1975, Mrs. Lee sold the home to Virginia and John Kirby Ewing. John Kirby Ewing is a fourth generation Texan with an interesting line of forbearers. The great-great-grandfather of John Kirby Ewing, James Leeper Ewing, moved from Tennessee to East Texas in the 1830s to take advantage of the available land grants. The cousin of his great-great-grandfather, James L. Ewing, took part in the siege of Bexar as a member of Capt. William R. Carey's artillery company and later served as secretary to Lt. Col. James C. Neill, commander of the Texan forces occupying Bexar. He died in the battle of the Alamo on March 6, 1836.

John Kirby Ewing's grandfather, James Alexander Ewing, was born in Angelina, Texas and moved to Houston in the early 1900s. James Ewing maintained a hardwood lumber mill in the town of Ewing near Lufkin. His wife, however, wished to reside in Houston. The Ewing family purchased one of the first lots in the new Hyde Park subdivision at 1002 Hyde Park Boulevard, where they raised their eight children.

According to the Handbook of Texas,

“Ewing was on the Angelina and Neches River Railroad ten miles southeast of Lufkin in northeastern Angelina County. It was the site of a hardwood lumbermill, active from 1920 to 1944. S. W. Henderson and H. G. Bohlssen formed a corporation called the H. G. Bohlssen Manufacturing Company and built a mill at a site near the Angelina River. The corporation was capitalized at \$200,000, and stock was divided among thirty-five stockholders. Bohlssen died in the early 1920s, and after his widow sold out to Henderson the company name was changed to Angelina Hardwood Company.

James A. Ewing, one of the stockholders, gave his name to the post office granted to the community in 1920. The old Ewing plantation belonging to his family had had the largest number of slaves in Angelina County at the time of the Civil War ...At its largest, Ewing had nearly 1,000 inhabitants, several stores and churches, and many houses. The largest number of businesses listed for Ewing by the Texas Almanac was eight during the 1930s. The mill produced 40,000 feet of hardwood a day and employed 250 men. Around 1944 it was closed because the available timber was exhausted. In 1945 Ewing had only one business and a population of fifty, and shortly after that it was abandoned. The Texas Highway Department lists it as an abandoned railroad station.”

As an aside, James Alexander Ewing’s maternal grandfather was the first mayor of Beaumont.

John Kirby Ewing was born in 1923 in Mercedes, Texas. He spent some of his early years in Houston living with his aunt and uncle, Daisy and Sayles Leach (chairman of Texaco) and attending Poe Elementary School. He later was selected by Congressman Milton H. West, among 42 applicants, to attend the U.S. Naval Academy. During this time, Mr. Ewing was acquainted with Jesse H. Jones as described below:

“While in Washington, I became well acquainted with Jesse Jones of Houston who was Secretary of Commerce and Director of Reconstruction Finance Administration. I reported my grades to him. He, in turn, reported to Uncle Sayles. In time, we became good friends. On one occasion, he invited me to sit in on the occasion of an application by a large railroad company for a major loan.... He demonstrated the error of their requesting too small a loan and revealed when, on extension, they would go broke. He then demonstrated, on a projection, using their assumptions proving his point, namely, that the larger loan amount would make a success of the railroad’s plan. I never forgot his lesson and used it many times, later.”

Mr. Ewing then enrolled at the University of Texas in 1942 when a medical condition made attaining a naval commission impossible. During his time at UT, he worked for Governor Coke Stevenson. Mr. Ewing was a Silver Spur and instrumental in returning Bevo as a mascot, with the help of Governor Stevenson. After graduation, he worked for the Shary Estate in Mission, Texas. In 1947, he returned to Houston and, through the help of William Blanton at the Houston Chamber of Commerce, obtained a position with David C. Bentliff, making private equity loans. Mr. Bentliff was in partnership with Kenneth Dale Owen, and the firm was instrumental in putting together financing for Methodist Hospital and Heights Hospital.

John Kirby Ewing met architect Milton McGinty, during the discussions regarding Methodist Hospital. As a lender, Ewing insisted that Mr. McGinty move the planned utilities for Methodist from the basement to a higher level, which later proved to be extremely beneficial during the severe flooding of the Medical Center in June 2001. Ewing also rewrote the legal description on the deed of trust for Methodist Hospital to exclude the chapel at the eleventh hour of the financing. The chapel was essentially purchased and donated by Mrs. Ella Fondren with a check. In his later career, John Kirby Ewing was self employed and worked in a variety of capacities. In particular, he developed the Surrey Oaks Addition on the east side of Piney Point. He also was involved in: (1) acquiring land for a Phillips Petroleum plant, (2) managing the Kress and the Sterling Buildings, and (3) rehabilitating a well servicing and drilling equipment company.

Mr. Ewing was been active in Houston charities during his many years here. Of note, he was instrumental in the purchase of the current site of St. Luke's Church. He served as board member and Chairman of the Board for the Mental Health Association of Houston and Harris County. In this capacity, he helped to shape national legislation with regard to mental health. His other activities include: Houston Chapter of the American Red Cross, President of the Kiwanis, and the Eagle Scout program. Of note, while Chair of the Red Cross Safety Training Committee, Mr. Ewing initiated the first and largest one-day training in CPR in Red Cross history. Through his professional and charitable activities, Mr. Ewing has touched Houston in many ways.

The home at 1508 Kirby Drive was designed by Nunn and McGinty, and the following is biographical information on each of the partners:

Architect Stayton Nunn was born in Arkansas in 1899. He attended Trinity University in Waxahachie from 1916 to 1919. He earned degrees from Rice in 1921 and 1922, and taught in the Rice architecture department from 1928 until 1941. Nunn practiced architecture in Houston for over 40 years.

From 1922 to 1928, Nunn worked as a draftsman for one of Houston's most prominent architects, William Ward Watkin (1886-1952). According to Stephen Fox, William Ward Watkin's "best buildings were designed during the later 1920's when Stayton Nunn was a member of his firm." In 1928, Nunn started a solo practice. In 1935, he entered into partnership with Milton McGinty. His later career brought an assignment as the coordinating architect for Houston Independent School District (1946-58). He finished his career at Nunn, Nunn & Ulbricht, a partnership with his son.

Milton McGinty was born in Saratoga, Texas 1906, and grew up in Rowell, New Mexico (1910-18). He returned to Texas and earned a B. A. from Rice in 1927 and his B. S. in architecture in 1928. While at Rice, he studied under William Ward Watkin. During his post graduate year, McGinty won the first Rice Traveling Fellowship in Architecture and spent 10 months touring Europe.

During McGinty's early years as an architect, he worked for Maurice Sullivan, Birdsall Briscoe, and John Staub. Then, as stated above, he worked with Stayton Nunn from 1935 to 1949. After 1949 and until his retirement around 1975, he practiced with his brother and sons in The McGinty Partnership, Architects. During his career, he served as President of the South Texas Chapter, American Institute of Architects; as President of the Texas Society of Architects; and as national Director for the Gulf States Region, A.I.A. He received his Fellowship from the A.I.A. in 1949. In 1976, he received the highest honor bestowed by the Texas Society of Architects, the Pitts Award, for his contributions to the profession of architecture. His civic work included the Boards of the American Red Cross, the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children, the City of Houston Planning Commission and the Texas State Board of Architectural Examiners. He was President of the Houston Engineering and Scientific Society, President of the Kiwanis Club of Houston, a 33rd Degree Scottish Rite Mason, a member of the Holland Lodge #1, and Arabia Temple Shrine. Throughout his life he was a loyal supporter of his Alma Mater, Rice, where he endowed the McGinty Scholars Program in the School of Architecture which exists today.

According to Stephen Fox, the homes and buildings completed by Nunn & McGinty include:

Nunn & McGinty

- 100 Sandman Street, De Pelchin Faith Home, 1935-37, Architectural Record, August 1941 (41-)
- 7500 Kelving Drive, Glennlee, Glenn H. McCarthy House, 1935-37 (demolished)
- Five houses for John Embry, Idylwood, 1936
- 2406 Wichita Avenue, Susie Louise Weathersby House, 1936

- River Oaks Community Center, West Gray Avenue and South Shepherd Drive, 1936-37, with Oliver C. Winston (Architectural Record June 1940)
- 109 N. Post Oak Lane, Dudley C. Sharp House, 1937-38 (demolished), (House & Garden May 1940)
- Remington Lane, Edward W. Kelley, Jr., House, 1938
- 1508 Kirby Drive, E. A. Cox House, 1938
- 3260 Truxillo Avenue, Cuney Homes, 1938-40, with John F. Staub, Architectural Forum, November 1940 (462-63)
- 1119 Grove Street, Kelley Courts, 1939-41
- 4 South West Oaks, M. B. Richardson House, 1939-40 (demolished)
- The Golden Girl, 1927 West Gray Avenue, 1940 (demolished)
- 1221 S. Cage Boulevard, Pharr TX, Leland McCullough House, 1940, William C. Baxter, associate architect
- Jamail's Grocery, 75th and Lawndale, 1941-42
- Methodist Hospital, Bertner Avenue, 1951, with William Ward Watkin, Milton McGinty, and Vance D. Phenix

Alone, the architects had vibrant careers. The following are buildings that they completed separately.

Stayton Nunn

- Cleveland Sewell House (National Historic Landmark), 3456 Inwood Drive – Cram & Ferguson with Stayton Nunn, 1926
- 2235 Albans Road, House for Mrs. Stayton Nunn, 1928 (altered)
- 2011 University Boulevard, House for Southgate, Inc., 1930
- 2012 Dryden, House for Southgate, Inc., 1930
- 1927 Wroxton Road, Robert H. Williams House, 1930-31
- 7185 Santa Fe Drive, Garden Villas Elementary School, 1931-32 (with Edward Wilkinson)
- 2121 Brentwood Drive, Dr. C. M. Griswold House, 1929
- 2128 Brentwood Drive, Colonel Bates House, 1937 (information from RO Scrapbook)
- Houston Gardens, 100 houses for Houston Gardens, Inc., 1933-34
- 1214 Berthea Avenue, H. Malcolm Lovett House, 1933-34; addition, 1951 (demolished-1998)
- Houston Gardens Elementary School, 1935 (demolished)
- 2426 Inwood Drive, Ben C. Duffie, Jr., House, 1935
- 5 Tiel Way, Forrest Lee Andrews House, 1952
- Pearland High School, 1953, 1960
- Spring Branch Junior High School, 1000 Piney Point Road, 1956, with C. A. Johnson
- John L. McReynolds Junior High School, 5910 Market Street, 1956
- 210 Pine Hollow Lane, Col. William B. Bates House, 1959 (Nunn, Nunn & Ulbricht)
- 6333 South Braeswood Boulevard, Fondren Junior High School, 1959 (Nunn, Nunn & Ulbricht)
- R. H. Fonville Junior High School, 725 East Little York Road, 1958-60 (Nunn, Nunn & Ulbricht)

Milton McGinty

- Holland Lodge No. 1, 4911 Montrose Avenue, 1954
- Rice Stadium, 1950 (with Herman Lloyd & W.B. Morgan)
- Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, 5520 Armour Drive, 1955
- James M. Delmar Field House, 2020 Magnum Road, 1958

- Houston Baptist University Academic and Student Center Building, 7502 Fondren, (w/Herman Lloyd & W.B. Morgan, 1963
- YMCA East End Branch (Cossaboom Branch), 7903 South Loop East, 1955

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The home located at 1508 Kirby, the corner of Kirby and Lazy Lane, is a two-story, brick veneer residence, which is five bays in width. The house is two stories in height with a low hipped roof. The most notable feature of the primary façade is the deeply inset, central entry which is flanked on either side by two forward window bays. The home was designed in a modified Georgian Revival style. The inset entry and balanced forward bays are reminiscent of rear “galleries with cabinets,” which are common elements in early to mid-nineteenth century Louisiana Creole built homes.

The house was designed with classical symmetry on the exterior as well as the interior. Upon entering the home, the foyer leads to a vaulted hallway that is oriented along the north-south axis of the home. On the northern side of the foyer is the formal living room, and on the southern side is the dining room. The hallway (on both sides) ends in gracious arched entries to the living room and the dining room. The original backdoor (on axis with the front door) now leads to the morning room.

Only two families have owned the home at 1508 Kirby, since its construction in 1938. In 1975 Virginia and John Kirby Ewing purchased the home from Edward and Josephine Cox’s daughter, Margery Cox Lee. At that time the Ewings hired architect, Milton McGinty, to design a rear addition to the home. The rear addition included an extension of an existing study, an added utility room and workshop, as well as a two car garage. Wooden beams, salvaged from an old Texas building, were utilized for the ceiling in the family room.

In the backyard, the couple added a Serpentine wall to provide privacy from Kirby Drive and Lazy Lane. The garden maintains the home’s original terrace and a mature azalea planting that curves gently along with the Serpentine wall. This lovely home was featured in the November 1981 edition of *Vogue-Mexico*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Fox, Stephen, personal notes and research Stayton Nunn, October, 2006

Fox, Stephen, Houston Architectural Guide, American Institute of Architects, 1999

Houston Chronicle, “Stayton Nunn Service Set Today”, December 27, 1985

Houston Chronicle, “Milton Bowles McGinty Obituary”, January 31, 2000

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. ", " <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/EE/hve41.html> (accessed January 26, 2007).

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. ", " <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/EE/few5.html> (accessed January 26, 2007).

Interview by Kelley Trammell of John Kirby and Virginia Ewing, January 25, 2007

John Kirby Ewing Autobiography, “Autobiography for Grandchildren,” 2005.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

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

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	
<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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to Houston City Council the Landmark Designation of the Cox-Ewing House at 1508 Kirby Drive.

SITE LOCATION MAP
COX-EWING HOUSE
1508 KIRBY DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE



