

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Benjamin Renard Homestead

OWNER: Kate Miller-Groetzinger

APPLICANT: Same as Owner

LOCATION: 4109 Lillian Street

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IIe

HPO FILE NO: 06L178

DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-14-07

HAHC HEARING DATE: Apr-25-07

PC HEARING DATE: May-10-07

SITE INFORMATION:

Tract 17, Renard Section 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic one-story, wood frame residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Benjamin Renard Homestead is a one story "T" plan cottage constructed circa 1884. The home is located within the Renard subdivision which is named for Benjamin Renard, a French native who immigrated to America in 1875. The Renard house is a rare surviving example of a suburban farmhouse where the resident farmed the property surrounding the house and likely sold his products at the City market in downtown Houston. The home qualifies for Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 4, and 5.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 4109 Lillian was built circa 1884 and was the homestead of Benjamin Renard. The home is located in the Renard subdivision, named for Benjamin Renard and first platted on August 7, 1903. Prior to 1903, the area had been the location of Benjamin Renard's farm, which he purchased from Charles and Annexia Miller in 1884. The sale was for five acres of land located between the City of Houston's westernmost boundary and the brand new Brunner subdivision, which lay immediately to the west of the property.

Benjamin F. Renard was born in the Loire Valley region of France in 1848. He immigrated to America circa 1875, although it is not known where he settled initially. He moved to Houston prior to November 4, 1880. At that time, he leased a three-acre tract of land located along the north side of Buffalo Bayou known as the Cypress Vineyard, which had bayou frontage on its south side and which sat directly across the bayou from the City Mills. Renard leased the vineyard for three years with the agreement that he would keep the property in cultivation, maintain the house on the property, and provide the owner, E. F. Schmidt and family, with fresh fruit and vegetables. After the lease of the Cypress Vineyard ended, he purchased land from Charles and Annexia Miller on June 10, 1884. The land was located in the western suburbs between the Houston city limits, which ended just east of Renard's property, and the Brunner subdivision to the west, which was developed in 1888, several years before the Houston Heights. It was here that Benjamin Renard built his homestead and operated a small suburban farm.

According to the Handbook of Texas and Harris County Deed Records, Brunner originally lay along the western boundary of the John Austin Survey, spanning from Buffalo Bayou northward to White Oak Bayou. It was traversed in an east-west direction by two major traffic arteries, the Houston and Texas Central Railroad and Washington Road. It was located about three miles west of the city limits of Houston. The area was platted in September 1888. The addition contained 137 numbered blocks, being seven blocks wide by twenty blocks long, large by Houston real estate development standards in the 1880s. The area was named for Anton Brunner

(1841-1930), a shoemaker, and his wife, Bertha Bethje Brunner, who originally settled in Houston in 1868. Apparently Brunner saved his money and invested in real estate, initially outside the city limits of Houston, which would become Brunner. He sold his shoe business and became involved in real estate only after 1892. The two central north – south streets in Brunner that were named after them are the only two streets today that no longer possess their original names, Brunner Avenue (now Shepherd Avenue) and Bethje Avenue (now North Durham).

In 1894, the population of Brunner was 200 and by 1895, it had its own post office and county elementary school, first called Brunner, then Alexander, the predecessor of Ben Milam Elementary School. In 1896, Brunner was incorporated as an independent municipality, the same year Houston Heights was incorporated. The development of Houston Heights by an eastern syndicate of investors, headed by Oscar Martin Carter, who also developed the Houston Electric Streetcar line for use by all Houstonians, also enhanced the attractiveness of Brunner, but competed with it at the same time. Brunner included newly developed subdivisions to the east, such as Koehler's First Addition, platted in 1894, and Magnolia Grove Addition, platted in 1895. Brunner ceased being a town in 1899, but in 1901, the Brunner School District was incorporated. The post office, however, was discontinued in 1905, and thereafter the mail was delivered from Houston. In 1895, a Baptist college, a German school, and a public school were in operation in Brunner, and the town had two churches, a saloon, and a population of 500. As late as 1905 the population remained at 482. By 1908, Houston's Washington Avenue was the principal commercial thoroughfare of Brunner, with neighborhood convenience businesses and a few professional offices concentrated between Fowler and Sandman. By 1908-09, city directory listings indicate that the southern portion of Brunner, south of the H & T C line, was the most settled section of the area. By 1909, Brunner Water & Light Company was chartered to supply Brunner with public utilities. All of that growth, though it happened gradually, required protection from fire by a Volunteer Fire Department. This area was annexed by the City of Houston circa 1913.

Renard first appears in the City of Houston Directories in 1889. At that time he is already listed as a farmer residing on Washington Road ¼ mile west of the Southern Pacific Railway. As more development and new streets were laid out along the western edge of Houston, Renard's address became more specific. By 1899, Renard's address was given as "1 block South of Washington Rd and 4 Blocks West of Irvin Street." Irvin Street was the southernmost extension of Heights Boulevard, which would eventually become the northbound side of Waugh Drive between Buffalo Bayou and Washington Avenue. In 1903, his address was "1 block south of Washington Rd and 4 blocks west of (Heights) Boulevard." The Renard homestead finally received its Lillian Street address in 1907.

Benjamin Renard married Wilhelmine Butow on September 16th, 1897, at Trinity Lutheran Church. At that time Renard was a 49-year-old gardener. The marriage apparently did not last, and the couple was separated by 1900. When the Renard household was enumerated in the 1900 US census, taken in Harris County, three people were listed at that address, and Wilhelmine Butow-Renard was not included in the list of inhabitants. Living with Benjamin Renard at that time were Robert Bearsleux, age 22, who was listed as Renard's son, and Hallie Bearsleux, aged 18, who was listed as Benjamin Renard's daughter. Both Robert and Hallie Bearsleux claimed to have been born in Iowa and listed Benjamin Renard as their father. This statement is not corroborated by historical evidence, however.

By 1903, Benjamin Renard had diversified into real estate. In July 1903, he began to subdivide his five-acre homestead tract. The first section to be platted with individual lots was the central portion of the property located between modern-day Floyd and Blossom Streets and Jackson Hill to the east. The Frisco Addition was immediately adjacent to Renard's property on the west, which is bordered by Olive Street. The first property to be sold from the newly platted Renard Addition was Lots 8 and 9 in Block 1 to Mrs. J. J. Livingston on November 26, 1903. The sale price was \$425 plus 6% interest to be paid in monthly installments of \$15. The

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

lots faced south on Blossom Street west of Jackson Hill Street. Both Benjamin and Wilhelmine Renard's names are on the Renard plat and on deed transactions, but it is evident that this was a business relationship.

A late Victorian cottage was constructed circa 1905 to the east of the lot on which 4109 Lillian sits. In that year, Benjamin Renard was listed in City Directories as residing at 1203½ Capitol Street in downtown Houston. In 1907, Benjamin Renard was back at the residence on Lillian where there were two street addresses for 4107 and 4109 Lillian. After 1908, Benjamin Renard was listed as residing at 4107 Lillian while the house at 4109 Lillian appeared to be a tenant house with a new tenant every year until the late 1920s. After that point the house was sold by the Renard heirs.

On August 23, 1917, the events which came to be known as the Camp Logan riots occurred in Houston near the site of the Benjamin Renard House. The riot was the result of tensions between African-American US Army soldiers stationed at Camp Logan and the Houston Police Department. Camp Logan was a World War I army training camp located in what is now Memorial Park at the approximate location of Washington Avenue and Westcott Streets. The culmination of many months of built-up frustration, on the part of the African-American soldiers because of the poor treatment they received from Houston law enforcement, came to a head in an explosive situation in which the soldiers took up arms and marched out of Camp Logan towards downtown Houston. The catalyst for the situation had been the mistreatment of one of their own soldiers earlier in the day. The path of the enraged soldiers of the Company I 24th Infantry 3rd battalion began at their camp, which had been located at the western terminus of Washington Road. The soldiers began to march in a generally southeasterly direction towards downtown Houston. The soldiers turned south on Roy street and then on to Lillian just a few blocks west of the Renard house. Troops allegedly fanned out through the neighborhood, killing or wounding people at 4910 Lillian and at a residence near present day Floyd Street and Shepherd. The Renards were spared, however. The Camp Logan riots resulted in the largest military court-martial in United States history.

Benjamin Renard died on March 13, 1918. At the time of his death, Benjamin Renard's estate was valued at an estimated \$10,000. Renard's will stipulated that all of his debts and funeral expenses be paid from his estate. The will further bequeathed \$5 to his wife Wilhelmine. The remainder of his estate was to be divided equally between his niece, Eugenia Renard and nephew, Abel Renard. The heirs were his brother's son and daughter, who lived in Haute Chappe pres Vendome Loir et Cher, France. Wilhelmine moved into the house in 1918 and lived there until 1921. She was re-married to a Mr. Femelat in the 1920s. Afterwards, the property passed through a succession of owners, including Lee Littlefield, a well-known Houston artist.

After World War I, a new east-west street was cut through the Renard subdivision between Lillian and Floyd. The new street was named Barnes, in honor of S. L. Barnes, a local Houstonian killed in action during World War I. Other notable streets, named in honor of Houston's World War I dead were Bartlett, Bissonnet, Tuck, and Waugh.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Benjamin Renard house is a "T" shaped cottage so named for its cross axis floor plan which resembles the letter T. The body of the home consists of two intersecting gable roof ridges. A gable roof and ridge which runs parallel to Lillian Street intersects at a right angle with another roof ridge which is oriented perpendicular to Lillian Street and located to the west side of the house. The perpendicular roof ridge terminates at a gable end decorated with fish scale shingles facing Lillian.

The home is of the Folk Victorian style with prominent forward bay to the west side of the house and a porch located along the east side of the main façade, which also incorporates a central entry door with double doors. The home is one story in height with beveled wood siding and a brick pier and beam foundation. Windows are two-over-two pane double-hung wood sash, but are probably later replacements. Architectural evidence as seen in the attic crawlspace indicates two different stages of construction. The portion of the house with a gable end

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

facing Lillian appears to have originally been a free standing “I” cottage with either hipped or gabled roof. Both the attic rafters and floor joists found in this portion of the house are oriented parallel to Lillian Street and do not tie into the framing structure of the eastern portion of the house. Those rafters and floor joists found in the eastern portion of the house, including the front entry and porch, are oriented perpendicular to Lillian Street. The wide plank pine flooring in the home reflects these different orientations as well. The central, double door entry is located beneath the applied porch and is capped by a single pane transom window.

It is most likely that the classical, round columns on the front porch are an early replacement, circa 1905. Originally the house most likely featured, turned wood columns. However, the existing columns are compatible to the house and porch configuration. Subsequent remodeling efforts added additional square footage to the rear of the house which is not visible from Lillian Street. The original portion of the home maintains a high degree of architectural integrity and is well maintained as a single family residence. Interestingly, the circa 1905 house at 4107 Lillian was moved to a location several blocks away to the property of the Hiram Butler Art Gallery. The vacant lot where that house stood is once again used as a vegetable and herb garden for nearby Patronella’s Italian Restaurant, nearly 120 years after it was originally used as the Renard garden.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Harris County Contract Records Vol. 1 p. 260.
Harris County Deed Records Vol. 49 p. 265, Vol. 87 p. 329, Vol. 191 p. 513.
Harris County Probate Minutes Vol. 46 pp. 607-609.
Hinton, Marks, Historic Houston Streets: The Stories Behind the Names, 2006.
Houston City Directories 1880-1925.
Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps 1896-1924.

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, and G. Randle Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation (Sec. 33-224(a)(1));	
<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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(2));	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(3));	
<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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(4));	

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(6);
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present (Sec. 33-224(a)(7);
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride (Sec. 33-224(a)(8).
- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Benjamin F. Renard Homestead at 4109 Lillian Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

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SITE LOCATION MAP
BENJAMIN F. RENARD HOMESTEAD
4109 LILLIAN STREET
NOT TO SCALE

