

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Charles W. Duncan, Sr., House

**OWNERS:** William P. and Carol A. Cantrell

**APPLICANTS:** William P. and Carol A. Cantrell

**LOCATION:** 3664 Inverness Drive - River Oaks

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

**AGENDA ITEM:** II.b

**HPO FILE NO.:** 07L181

**DATE ACCEPTED:** May-8-07

**HAHC HEARING:** May-23-07

**PC HEARING:** June-7-07

### SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 11, Block 79, River Oaks Section 9, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is an historic two-story brick veneered residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Charles W. Duncan, Sr., House at 3664 Inverness Drive was built by J. Leon Osborn in 1949. It was originally purchased by Charles W. Duncan, Sr., a prominent Houstonian and one of the principals of the Duncan Coffee Company. Duncan Coffee (later Duncan Foods, Inc.) developed into one of the largest food product manufacturing concerns headquartered in Houston, with total sales of \$90 million. The company was acquired by Coca-Cola Foods, Inc., in 1964. That same year, the Duncans established the Lillian and C. W. Duncan Foundation for charitable giving. The Charles W. Duncan, Sr., House meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4 for Landmark Designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Charles W. Duncan, Sr., House was built as a speculative home, with construction beginning in February 1949. At that time, an article appeared in the Houston Post:

“J. Leon Osborn, builder, is constructing two large residences in River Oaks for a total of \$245,000. Mr. Osborn said he is building a two story colonial brick ... at 3755 Knollwood for \$150,000 and a two story white brick colonial on a half acre tract at Inverness and Timber Lane for \$95,000. Both residences, the builder said, have entrance halls, large living rooms with real fireplaces, screened porches, powder rooms, electric kitchens and air conditioning... The other place [3664 Inverness] will have five bedrooms and three baths and a barbeque house attached to the screened porch.”

The house was purchased by Charles and Lillian Duncan later in 1949 shortly before its completion. At that time, a large photo of the home was accompanied by the caption:

“BOUGHT BY COFFEE COMPANY EXECUTIVE – This residence built by J. Leon Osborne at 3664 Inverness River Oaks has been purchased by C. W. Duncan, vice president of the Duncan Coffee Co. Revenue stamps indicated the consideration was about \$95,000.”

Charles William Duncan, Sr., was born on March 27, 1890, in Fountain Run, Kentucky. He and his brother Herschel Mills Duncan, born in November 1888, were tobacco farmers. They were sons of John Green Duncan and his wife, Margaret Permelia Neal. Charles became a banker and the mayor of Scottsville, Kentucky. He was a big man, about 6 feet 2 inches, and very outgoing and affable. He married Lillian House who, in contrast to Charles, was only 5 feet 2 inches, but like Charles, was calm and likable.

In 1910, Charles' brother Herschel moved to Houston to work for their mother's brother, John William (J. W.) Neal, at the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. In 1901, Joel Cheek and J. W. Neal, both Kentucky natives, had formed the Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing Company, later renamed the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, on Market Street in Nashville. That same year they began to produce Maxwell House coffee.

In 1903, Joel Cheek sent his son, Robert, to Houston to supervise the construction and opening of a second coffee plant for the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. Cheek-Neal chose Houston for their business expansion no doubt due to the business dynamics and opportunities that Houston offered, including direct shipping to Houston's port from South America. The new office and factory were located at 1121 Carr Street, at the southwest corner of Carr and Conti Streets in the Fifth Ward. The site consisted of a three-story, brick factory building with an attached one-story warehouse running parallel and adjacent to the railroad track of the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, which afforded efficient shipping. By 1905, Robert Cheek had returned to Nashville and J. W. Neal had moved to Houston and assumed the management of the Houston branch as Vice-President of Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. By 1909, J. W. Neal was residing in the up-and-coming new Avondale Addition in Houston where he built the first house there at 301 Avondale Boulevard. Herschel Duncan and two of his cousins, all nephews of J. W. Neal, came to Houston in 1907 to work at Cheek-Neal, and lived with their uncle at 301 Avondale for a time. Herschel M. Duncan was soon promoted to superintendent of his uncle's business, Cheek-Neal Coffee.

Cheek-Neal Coffee Company roasted, packaged and shipped Maxwell House coffee not only from its Houston and Nashville locations, but also from factories established in Richmond, Virginia, and Jacksonville, Florida. In 1917, Cheek-Neal built a new larger plant at 2017 Preston Avenue (City of Houston Landmark, 2005) at a cost of \$100,000 that was "filled with state-of-the-art machinery for cleaning, roasting, grinding and packaging coffee." J. W. Neal left the coffee business in 1928 when he and Cheek sold Cheek-Neal Coffee Company.

When Cheek-Neal Coffee moved to 2017 Preston in 1917, Herschel Duncan went into the coffee business himself with only one coffee roaster at the former Cheek-Neal location at 1121 Carr Street. He was joined in the coffee business by his brother Charles in 1921. Hershel's interest in the coffee business venture was likely inspired by the growth Houston was experiencing shortly after the Houston Ship Channel was widened and deepened in 1915, an event that would spring-board Houston to its world port status today. Duncan, who achieved his own fame as the founder of Admiration Coffee, known for its Admiration coffee blend, which later became a special blend, Maryland Club, eventually expanded his coffee business into one of the six largest coffee-roasting businesses in the United States. "Duncan challenged his uncle's slogan by countering with his own, declaring that, with Admiration Coffee, 'even our last drop is good.'" In 1937, Maryland Club "appeared on grocery shelves as 'the coffee you would drink if you owned all the coffee in the world.'"

In 1928, Charles and Lillian Duncan purchased a two-story red brick home in River Oaks at 3256 Avalon Dr. The couple had two sons, Charles Jr., born September 9, 1926, and John House Duncan, born January 22, 1928. A daughter died at age 8 of a brain tumor. The family lived in the Avalon residence until 1949 when they moved to 3664 Inverness. Lillian's son John remembers one of her favorite sayings: "Worrying about small things will make you a small person."

In 1947, Charles Jr. joined Herschel and Charles Sr. at the Duncan Coffee Company, where the three men worked together for the next ten years. On February 15, 1957, Herschel Duncan died unexpectedly following an accident at his home at 3320 Chevy Chase. The Duncan Coffee Company continued operating at 1121 Carr (1200 Carr) and 2001 Rothwell until 1957 when the Duncans sold the company to Otis, McAllister & Co. in San Francisco, California.

In 1959, Charles Jr. put together a group of investors to buy Duncan Coffee back from Otis, McAllister & Co. He renamed the company Duncan Foods Co. and, together with Charles Sr., ran the company for several more years. The Duncans opened a new \$3 million plant at 7105 Katy Road soon thereafter. Charles Jr. was president

of Duncan Foods from 1959 to 1964. During that time the company bought several other businesses, including Butter-Nut Coffee. Under the direction of the Duncans, the company became the largest food product manufacturer headquartered in Houston, with total sales of \$90 million. In 1964, Duncan Foods Co. was acquired by the Coca-Cola Company.

Charles Duncan, Jr., was president of Coca-Cola from 1971 to 1974. He served as Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1977-1979 and as U.S. Secretary of Energy from 1979 to 1981 in President Jimmy Carter's administration. John Duncan achieved equal success, serving as president of Gulf+Western for 12 years. During this time Gulf+Western became an American conglomerate.

Charles W. Duncan, Sr., remained active in the coffee business until he died at the age of 88. His obituary noted his position as former Chairman of the Board of Duncan Foods, Inc., and member of St. Luke's United Methodist Church. His pallbearers included Donald R. Keough (past Chairman of Coca-Cola), Jack Trotter, Howard Horne, L. W. Stolz, Jr. and Edward Randall III. A life-size oil painting of Charles Sr., that for years was displayed at the old Duncan Coffee Company, now hangs on the wall in Charles Jr.'s office on the 61<sup>st</sup> floor of the JP Morgan Tower. After Lillian Duncan died, her sons sold the house on Inverness in 1983 to its present owners, the Cantrells.

The house at 3664 Inverness was built as a speculative home by contractor, J. (John) Leon Osborn, who was active in River Oaks from at least 1938 to 1950. He was a lifelong resident of Houston until he died in 1972. His obituary lists his involvement in the community as a member of First Methodist Church; Board of Directors of Asbury Seminary of Wilmore, Kentucky; Board of Directors of Star of Hope; and a lifetime member of Gideon's. Osborn completed the following homes in River Oaks:

- 3308 Chevy Chase (1938) - now 1820 River Oaks Blvd, home of Mrs. J. C. Bering and later General Maurice and Winifred Hirsch
- 3909 Del Monte (1948) - J. Leon Osborn's residence
- 3699 Willowick (1950) – now 3711 Willowick, home of Jacques and Candace Mossler and later Frank and Sharon Lorenzo
- 3755 Knollwood (1950)
- 1929 Olympia (since demolished)
- 3457 Meadow Lake Lane (1940)
- 3615 Meadow Lake Lane (1939)

The current owners interviewed John and Charles Duncan, Jr., who gladly recounted their happy memories about their family. According to Charles Duncan, Jr. when Mrs. Duncan and the rotund family housekeeper got stuck in the elevator, the family never used it after that. Interestingly, the same thing happened to the Cantrells, who never used it after that either.

Coincidentally, both the Duncans and the Cantrells had a housekeeper named Rosalie who loved to cook on an old 1948 six-burner Garland gas stove in the kitchen. It has a cast iron top, stainless steel panels, and can fit two 25-pound turkeys in the oven. The stove fits neatly into a kitchen alcove lined with white tiles and old-style glass bricks. John said Rosalie used a can of shortening a week. Her specialty was hamburgers on Saturday night and fried chicken and apple pie on Sundays. The Duncans weren't socialites, but they loved to visit with their family and close friends, including Ben Love, who was John's best friend and lived across the street until Ben died in 2006.

John Duncan said Lillian was a 'concert pianist' and played many a tune on the old family Baldwin parlor grand piano. The Baldwin, now 80 years old, lies in storage waiting for the next Duncan grandchild with musical talent. The Cantrells have a Kimball parlor grand piano where the old Baldwin sat.

Like the Cantrells, Charles and Lillian spent most of their time in the home's library. John said that when he wanted to find his parents, he'd always go to the library. It has a large north window which faces a beautiful courtyard. When Charles first bought the house, the view from the window was the back of the garage, so he hired landscape architect, C.C. "Pat" Fleming, to design a courtyard there. When Fleming asked for a \$350 retainer, Charles resisted until Lillian told him to pay it.

The Duncan family ate in the dining room on weekends and special occasions, but ate in the breakfast room most of the time. The dining room had a large red chandelier that John Duncan moved to his home on Knollwood after they sold Inverness. Dennis Rasche still cleans the old red chandelier on Knollwood as well as the new one that replaced it on Inverness.

The kitchen has a small buzzer on the wall that rang when Mrs. Duncan pressed a button on the floor under the table in the dining room for service. Because Lillian Duncan was only 5 feet 2 inches, she had trouble reaching the floor buzzer. So she often used a small dinner bell on the table instead.

The entry hall stairway is the perfect place for the family Christmas tree. Each year, both the Duncans and Cantrells put their Christmas tree right in the bend of the staircase, with the tree top extending into the second floor. The top of the newel post on the stairway has a small round hole that once held a large pear-shaped pink marble finial, or "newel cap." John Duncan now has the newel cap at his Chevy Chase home.

On hot summer days, both the Duncans and Cantrells relaxed with a cool drink on the large covered screen porch that connects the back door to the garage, laundry room, and servants' quarters. It features a white brick fireplace with an attached brick barbeque pit. The porch had floor to ceiling screens until the Cantrells added white wood panels half way up for added security in the 1980s. The porch looks onto Timber Lane through the original ligustrum hedge designed by C.C. "Pat" Fleming in 1950. Neither the Duncans nor the Cantrells used the backyard much, but they could often be seen in the large front yard playing games or having birthday parties.

#### **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:**

The Charles W. Duncan, Sr., House was designed in the Colonial Revival style. The two-story home sits on the corner of Inverness Drive and Timber Lane on a large, wooded lot. The house is white brick with six round wide columns resting on a red brick porch. The front door has its original hardware and side lights, and the outside brick wall to the left of the door has the original solid bronze vertical mail slot made by American Device Manufacturing Co. in Illinois.

Upon entering the home, there is a large entry hall and a winding staircase with ornate spindles that curl upstairs. The downstairs has a large entry hall, living room, dining room, breakfast room, butlery, galley kitchen, walk-in pantry, guest bathroom, library, telephone hall, sunroom, basement, and screened porch with fireplace and barbeque pit. The dining room, entry hall, living room and library are covered with the same hardwood floor with 14 foot planks.

The old galley style kitchen is in its original condition. The walls are lined with white wooden cupboards, tiles, and old style glass bricks. The units, counters, and cupboards make a continuous array with no kitchen table, allowing maximum use of restricted space and minimum required movement between units. A butlery, with a large sink and ample countertops and cupboards, connects the kitchen to the dining room. In 1970, the Duncans added a downstairs master bedroom and bathroom suite, hallway, atrium, and elevator designed by architect, John F. Houchins. The bedroom and hallway have modern hardwood floors and large picture windows that overlook the atrium and the courtyard.

The home originally had two screened porches. One faced southeast to catch the evening breeze, which was typical of most homes in River Oaks built at that time, and one facing northwest. In 1970, the southeast porch

was built up, glassed in, and carpeted as part of the 1970 addition. It is now a sunroom and study. The porch facing northwest has a white brick fireplace and attached barbeque pit.

The upstairs also has 4 bedrooms, 3 full baths, a sun room, and sewing room with the original Precision folding stairs leading to a third-story attic. All rooms except the attic and bathrooms have the original hardwood flooring with 14 foot planks. The old master bedroom is now a game room, but the other rooms are still used for their original purpose. All the windows have the original 2-inch white wooden blinds purchased by Mrs. Duncan in 1949. The bathroom walls and floors have the original 5-inch square tiles in pastel shades of yellow, pink, blue, green, and coral that were popular in the 1940s. A slim row of decorative tiles borders the tiling across the top. The original bathtubs, showers, gas wall heaters, and free standing sinks are still there, but most of the toilets have been replaced.

As mentioned above, the landscaping was designed by renowned landscape architect C. C. "Pat" Fleming in 1950. The 1970 addition was designed by architect John F. Houchins. There have been no other significant additions or improvements.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Guidestar.org database of public and private charities.

Harris County Probate Court Records.

Houston Chronicle, "Services are set for Charles Duncan, Sr.", May 14, 1978.

Houston Chronicle, "Mrs. J.C. Bering is Erecting a \$35,000 River Oaks Home", April 17, 1938.

Houston Chronicle, 1972 Obituary for J. Leon Osborn.

Houston Post, article on building, February 6, 1949.

Original sketches and architectural plans of Osborn, Fleming, and Houchins.

Pace, G. Randle, Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, 2017 Preston Avenue, City of Houston Landmark Designation Application, 2005

Personal interviews with Charles W. Duncan, Jr., and John H. Duncan.

River Oaks Property Owners Association card files.

River Oaks Scrapbooks, Volumes 9, 10, 15 and 16.

Texas Secretary of State Business and Public Filings.

Stephen Fox, Adjunct Lecturer on Architecture at Rice University and author of Houston Architectural Guide.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston and G. Randle Pace, City of Houston, Historic Preservation Officer.*

### **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**

- (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));

- (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));
- (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));
- (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));
- (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 Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark Designation of the Charles W. Duncan, Sr., House at 3664 Inverness Drive.

SITE LOCATION MAP  
CHARLES W. DUNCAN, SR., HOME  
3664 INVERNESS DRIVE  
NOT TO SCALE



