

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Augusta Franck House  
**OWNER:** Robert and Cynthia Card  
**APPLICANT:** Same as Owner  
**LOCATION:** 2215 Decatur – Old Sixth Ward Historic District  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** I  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 07PL42  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Feb-03-07  
**HAHC HEARING:** Apr-25-07  
**PC HEARING:** May-10-07

### SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 10, Block 396, W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic one-story wood frame house on a high-raised foundation.

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

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Augusta Franck House, located at 2215 Decatur, was constructed in 1893. Augusta Franck, a native of Prussia, moved to Houston in 1882, but later perished in the Galveston Storm of 1900. The Queen Anne style home is one of the more elaborate examples than most of the early German immigrant-built cottages in the Old Sixth Ward, and the home is also an unusual example due to its high-raised foundation. The building meets Landmark Designation Criteria 1, 4, and 5, as well as being constructed before 1905 and being a contributing building to the National Register Historic District.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 2215 Decatur was constructed in 1893 for Augusta Schmidt Franck Miller, who was born in Prussia in 1847. Prussia was once an independent kingdom in Germany, which included the region around Berlin, which would later become part of unified Germany. Beginning in the 1840s, many Prussians came to Texas due to civil unrest and a faltering economy in their homeland.

Augusta Schmidt most likely immigrated to the United States through one of the largest ports for immigrants, which was Galveston, Texas, as she lived there before coming to Houston. While in Galveston, she married Victor Franck, a native Alsatian, who was born in 1841. Alsace, like Prussia, was one of the independent kingdoms in play for many years as political boundaries of Central Europe changed. Although Alsace today is part of France, many of the region's residents also speak German, and the region was once controlled by a tribe of Germanic people called the "Franks." Victor Franck operated Victor's Saloon at 212 23rd Street (now Tremont Street) in Galveston and rented rooms above the saloon. Victor died of cirrhosis of the liver on August 23, 1881 at the age of 41. Augusta continued to run the saloon in Galveston for a short while after his death, but moved to Houston in 1882.

Once in Houston, Augusta lived in the home of another widow, Mrs. Charlotte Eibert. Eibert was also a native Prussian, born in 1807, and may have been related to Augusta. Charlotte Eibert and Augusta Franck's home was located on Alexander Street in the Second Ward, near Schrimpf's farm, which was located east of Frost Town on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou. Augusta Franck lived at the Second Ward address for the next ten years. In 1892 and 1893, Augusta was not listed in Houston City Directories, and it is possible that she either moved back to Galveston during this time or was simply caught between residences at the time of publication of the 1893 Houston City Directory.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

On February 15, 1893, Mrs. Augusta Schmidt Franck Miller purchased Lots 9 and 10 of Block 396 in the W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, from Mr. E. P. Hamblen for \$800. The sale agreement stipulated that \$266 was put down and \$533 was owed within two years of that date with an interest of 8% per annum. There was no mention of any improvements on the property, and it is presumed that the lots were vacant. The deed transaction clearly states that the property was purchased with Augusta's separate funds for her separate use. Augusta's husband, John H. Miller, was a carpenter and is likely the one responsible for the construction of the house located on that property. John Miller was listed as residing at that address for the year 1894-1895. Mr. Hamblen signed a release in 1901 stating that the lots were paid off on time.

The earliest record of a transaction of the lot after Baker platted the neighborhood occurred on July 20, 1867. William R. Baker sold Blocks 296, 396, 407, 416, and 428 to Mr. James A. Chandler of Travis County for \$9000. Mr. Chandler sold these blocks to Mr. F. W. Chandler, also of Travis County, on March 18, 1872. F. W. Chandler in turn sold Lots 4 and 5 in Block 296, Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12 of Block 396, and Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11 in Block 407 to Mr. Henry E. Shelly, also of Travis County, on April 9, 1885. Mr. Shelley sold Lots 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of Block 196 to Mr. E. P. Hamblen on March 19th, 1890, for \$1,200.00.

On February 17, 1897, Augusta, using the name Augusta Franck, sold her house and adjacent Lot 9 to William Hagermann of Galveston. It appears Augusta had divorced Mr. Miller. She returned to Galveston, where she perished in the Great Storm of 1900 along with one of her daughters and approximately 6,000 other Galveston inhabitants.

In 1901, her surviving son, Gustave Franck, bought back both lots as well as Lot 8. Seven years later, in 1908, he gave Lots 8, 9, and 10 to his wife, Mollie Franck. In 1914 Mollie Franck gave ½ of Lot 9 to her daughter, Rubie Lee Franck, for love and affection and in consideration of \$1.00. Five years later in 1919, Mrs. Franck also gave Lot 10 to Rubie Lee for \$1 for love and affection.

The Old Sixth Ward Historic District has one of the largest concentrations of Victorian-era buildings in Houston. The majority of the houses standing today were built in the 1870s, 80s, and 90s as modest, one-story frame cottages occupied by a single family. The distinctive Victorian character of these dwellings was enhanced by decorative millwork usually applied to the front porches. As the 20th Century progressed, new housing reflected changes in architectural style. Bungalows were built among the Victorian cottages, but the essential character of the neighborhood did not change. During World War II, many of the houses were converted from single to multi-family dwellings, often owned by absentee landlords. Since achieving recognition as both a nationally and locally designated historic district, the Old Sixth Ward has witnessed the restoration of many homes to single-family occupancy.

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

In 1931, Rubie Lee Franck sold Lot 10 with the house at 2215 Decatur to Mr. Sam Geaccone, a landowner who owned many properties in the Sixth Ward. During the Geaccone family ownership, the house was converted into a tenant duplex. The duplex remained in the Geaccone family until it was sold to Mr. William Gay on September 11, 1996. By the time of the 1996 purchase, the house was in ruins after many years of deferred maintenance and a succession of tenants. In February 1997, Mr. Gay financed the sale of the house to Mr. David Hille, who remodeled the house.

The current owners purchased the house on July 15, 2002, and began an extensive restoration. During the restoration /rehabilitation, several alterations, added during the 1997 remodeling, were either removed or restored in order to revert the house to its original appearance and configuration.

The house is a good example of an elaborately designed, German working-man cottage, which features elements of the Queen Anne style. It is only one of a handful of houses in the neighborhood which are built on a high-raised foundation. The house rests on a four-foot-high raised brick pier foundation that was not evident in

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

an 1896 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, but which first appears on the 1907 Sanborn map of the same area. The bay window on the front façade was likely added during the same remodeling phase between 1896 and 1907 when the house was raised and a room with attached porch was added to the rear of the house. A bungalow-style dormer, which was a later alteration constructed during the Geaccone's ownership, was removed during the 1997 remodel because its weight was causing structural failures in the rest of the structure.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Harris County Deed Records, Volume 66, p. 97, 130, Volume 98, p. 417, Volume 107, p. 422.

Houston City Directories, 1870-1949.

United States Census 1880, Galveston County, Texas.

United States Census 1880, Harris County, Texas.

Sanborn Maps, 1896, 1907.

*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.*

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

**S NA**

**S - satisfies NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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);

# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Archaeological & Historical Commission**

**Planning and Development Department**

- (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).

**AND**

- (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).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

**OR**

- The property is 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 (Sec. 33-229(a)(3);

**OR**

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Augusta Franck House at 2215 Decatur Street.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP  
AUGUSTA FRANCK HOUSE  
2215 DECATUR STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

