

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Anna Stabe Kerstings Building  
**OWNER:** Hanges Despina Living Trust  
**APPLICANT:** Koule P. Hanges - Trustee  
**LOCATION:** 417 – 419 San Jacinto Street  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** VIII. c  
**HPO FILE NO:** 07PL50  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Oct-31-07  
**HAHC HEARING:** Jan-30-08  
**PC HEARING:** Feb-14-08

### SITE INFORMATION:

Tract 6, Block 47, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a three-story brick, masonry commercial building.

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

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Anna Stabe Kerstings Building, located at 417-419 San Jacinto Street, was built in late 1904. The three-story brick building replaced an earlier, two-story masonry building that had housed the Central Fire Station and Hook and Ladder #1, and that was, ironically, completely destroyed by fire in February 1904.

The Kerstings Building is constructed in the Neo-Classical style with a prominent clipped corner entry as well as arched window openings trimmed with contrasting brick. The first floor originally contained showrooms and was occupied by a motor car company as early as 1905. The second and third floors have, over the last 100 years, been used in the operation of various boarding houses and hotels, including the Vendome, Majestic, and Moore Hotels, making it the longest, continually operating hostelry building on its original site in Houston. The building has operated as the Londale Hotel since 1946. The Anna Stabe Kerstings Building meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5, and was constructed before 1905 - all considerations for Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Anna Stabe Kerstings was born to Henry and Louisa Stabe in 1856. According to the 1870 census, Henry and Louisa were born in the Hesse region of what is now known as Germany. The couple was among the many thousands of immigrants from central Europe to the United States and to Texas during the mid-nineteenth century. Anna and her two siblings were all born in Texas, however. Her sister, Nellie A. Stabe, was born in 1867 and later married Thomas James Baker. A brother, named Louis, was born in 1860 and died prior to 1904. Anna Stabe Kerstings was a widow as early as 1903. She had two children from her marriage, but details about them are unclear. The only mention of her family comes from a 1928 deed transaction between the 72-year-old Anna Kerstings and her daughters, Mrs. L. Dean and Miss Effie Decuir, who were both widows at that time. Anna Stabe Kerstings died in Bexar County, Texas, on November 15, 1938.

Anna's father, Henry Stabe, was at various times self-employed as an undertaker and a carpenter. The undertaker business was a relative newcomer to American cities during the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until then, the practice of preparing bodies for burial had largely taken place in the home by family members. Henry Stabe joined the firm of William Ruppensburg & Co., Undertaker, during the

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early to mid 1880s. Stabe was next listed as a carpenter, but eventually entered into the undertaker business as a partner with William L. Wall, an attorney, in 1890. Together they formed the firm of Wall and Stabe. The firm offered ambulance service, room accommodations for boarders, accommodations for the storage of the deceased, stables for horses, and a fleet of draft animals and carriages. In a 1905 advertisement for the company in the Houston City Directory, Wall and Stabe advertised, "Dealers in Wooden and metallic cases, coffins; Embalming and disinterring a specialty; finest Line of Carriages in the city." Henry Stabe's carpentry skills may have been put to use in the production of coffins for the firm, while his partner William Wall tended to the legal matters of the business. The Wall and Stabe business was located in a building at the northwest corner of the intersection of San Jacinto and Prairie, directly across the street from Anna Kerstings' building. The Wall and Stabe site was demolished by 1924 to make way for the ten-story Sam Houston Hotel, now operating as the Hotel Alden.

Wall and Stabe also made forays into the construction business as evidenced by a building contract dated 1901 in which Estelle Brady, executrix of the John Thomas Brady Estate, entered into contract with Wall and Stabe with Frank Bergeron, a contractor, for the construction of a brick house on Block 47, SSBB, which is the Kerstings Building block. Since no contract record was found for the construction of the building, it is possible that Wall and Stabe acted as general contractors for the construction of the Anna Stabe Kerstings Building as well.

The 1904 Kerstings building replaced an earlier, two-story masonry building that had housed the Central Fire Station and Hook and Ladder #1. The Central Fire Station building was completely destroyed by fire at 12:30 A.M. on the morning of February 8, 1904. At the time of the 1904 fire, a number of different businesses were located along the south side of Block 47 facing Prairie Avenue. The Central Fire Station was located at the southwest corner of the block at San Jacinto and Prairie. Located on the east side of the fire station were the stables of a Mr. Johnson. At its rear, the Johnson stable building was connected at a 90 degree angle with the stables of the livery firm of Westall and Williams, which were located on the San Jacinto side of Block 47, just north of the Central Fire Station building. Also on the Prairie side of the block were a boarding house and a residence.

According to newspaper accounts, the fire completely leveled the south side of Block 47 facing Prairie Avenue on the morning of February 8, 1904. The fire allegedly began on the second floor of Mr. Johnson's stable on Prairie, and quickly spread to the connected stables of Westall and Williams on San Jacinto. Subsequently, the fire jumped to the Central Fire Station located on the corner of San Jacinto and Prairie next to the two stables, and to adjacent buildings to the east of Johnson's stable. Before long, the entire south side of the block was on fire. The fire station's equipment, including hook and ladder and chemical trucks, was rescued from the burning fire station, but the building itself was a total loss. A photograph published in the Tuesday, February 9, 1904, edition of the Houston Daily Post depicts the one remaining corner of the destroyed Central Fire Station facing Prairie Avenue.

Newspaper accounts gave loss totals from each of the respective property owners, including Anna Kerstings, who was listed as the owner of the building housing the Central Fire Station. Her loss was estimated at \$8,000 with no insurance coverage on the property. The City of Houston, which occupied the Central Fire Station building, had losses estimated at \$5,000, of which only \$3,000 was insured.

According to the same newspaper accounts, a new, replacement Central Fire Station building was nearing completion at the corner of Texas Avenue and San Jacinto. Immediately following the fire, carpenters and contractors worked overtime to complete the new fire station building by the following Saturday, February 13, 1904, so that the now homeless fire company could occupy the new space. In the interim period between the fire and the completion of the replacement station, the fire company was

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housed in the converted stalls of the Houston City Market in Market Square. From a Houston Daily Post article, dated Tuesday February 9, 1904, titled "Cause of Fire Unknown; No New Developments Have Come to Light Concerning Monday's Fire", "...one of the neatest and quickest pieces of work ever completed in this city was done by some 15 or 20 carpenters yesterday afternoon in enclosing and fitting up the south end of the Market sheds for the temporary use of the department. The south end of the sheds were enclosed and floored with heavy plank in such a manner as to make a very comfortable little home for the boys and beasts until next Saturday, when they will be removed to their new and handsome home at the corner of Texas Avenue and San Jacinto streets."

Anna Stabe Kerstings evidently did not have clear title to the property at the time of the fire. Although she was listed as the owner of the building, she petitioned Houston City Council for a Quit Claim Deed to the ruined property on October 10, 1904. By act of Mayor A. L. Jackson and City Finance Committee, and in consideration of the sum of \$4,500 paid by Anna Kerstings, the property was released to her and is recorded in the minutes of Houston City Council dated November 9, 1904.

On November 22, 1904, Anna Kerstings used the lot and improvements as collateral on a \$15,000 loan from Max Dienstag, who dealt in wholesale and retail china, crockery, glassware, and lamps from his store on Main Street. Max Dienstag lived at 1212 Prairie, directly across the street from Anna Kerstings' ruined property. The notary public of record for the transaction was a man named Frank E. Pye, who six months later entered into a contract with Kerstings for the construction of several homes at the corner of Shaw and Andrews Street on Block 6 of the Seneschall Addition in the Fourth Ward.

A building permit was issued to Anna Kerstings for the construction of a three-story brick building on San Jacinto Street on November 29, 1904. The estimated cost of the building as stated in the permit was \$13,750. The building appears at its current location in the 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance company maps, and is the only building on the south side of the block to have been rebuilt following the disastrous 1904 fire. At the time of the 1924 Sanborn map set, only two buildings are located on the south side of the block - the Kerstings Building and the 1913 Westheimer Building at the southeast corner of the block.

In 1885, Block 47 was largely residential with the exception of the Central Fire Station and Wall and Noland Undertakers, located at the southeast corner of the block. The remaining buildings on the block were one and two-story frame houses. The block south of Block 47 was also largely residential, with a number of tenements and boarding houses. By 1896, Block 47 was almost entirely residential, with the exception of the fire station and a printing business housed in a former residence at the northwest corner of the block. At the time of construction of the Kerstings Building, there were several boarding houses and travelers hotels located in the general vicinity and the overall make up of the neighborhood had changed substantially. According to the 1907 Sanborn map, the majority of the buildings in the area were commercial or substantial multi-family residential buildings. By 1925, there were no more single family homes remaining on the block, and only a few were located on adjacent blocks.

The Kerstings Building has always been used as a boarding house or a hotel. The building was ideally situated only one block from the Harris County Courthouse and two blocks from the Main Street corridor. Union Station, which accounted for the bulk of Houston's passenger travel, was built in 1910 at the corner of Crawford and Texas Avenue only a short four blocks away. In 1905-06, the upper floors of the building were leased to Minnie E. Mathews, who operated a boarding house with furnished rooms. The August 8, 1904 lease agreement between Anna Kerstings and Minnie Mathews stipulated a move-in date of December 1, 1904 with a monthly rent of \$137.50. The building was not ready for move in on December 1, 1904, but was completed in time to be included in the 1905 Houston City Directory.

A succession of boarding house businesses followed. In 1907-1909, Isaac and Lula Griffith were listed as the proprietors of a furnished rooms business at this address. In 1910, the hotel was vacant, although the ground floor housed the Standard Auto Company. The Hotel Vendome operated in the upper two floors of the building in 1911-1915. The Vendome was followed by the Majestic Hotel from 1915 until 1928. In 1930, the upper floors of the building operated under the name Traveler Hotel. The Moore Hotel then operated at this address from the mid 1930s until 1945. The Lawndale Hotel opened at this location in 1946 and has operated as such until the present with an alteration of the spelling of its name to “Londale” Hotel.

The ground floor was used for an automobile repair and sales room as early as 1905 when the Houston Motor Car Company occupied the building. The ground floor continued to be used for this purpose until at least 1925. By the early 1920s, the ground floor space had been divided into a number of different commercial spaces, including space for an auto repair business, L. R. Beniretto’s Barber Shop, and John Mariolos Restaurant. The ground floor of the building currently houses Rachel’s Deli.

Anna Stabe Kerstings sold the property to her daughters, Mrs. L. Dean and Miss Effie Decuir, on September 19, 1928, for ten dollars and “in consideration of love and affection for my two daughters.”

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

The Anna Stabe Kerstings Building is a three-story, solid masonry building designed and constructed in the Neo-Classical style. The building is 50 foot wide facing San Jacinto Street and 95 foot wide facing Prairie Avenue. The building features a prominent, canted corner at the corner of San Jacinto Street and Prairie Avenue, which also serves as the location of the main ground floor. On the second floor above the corner entry, is a pair of wood French doors with single upper lites that lead on to a small semi-circular metal balcony. On the third floor level of the canted corner are a pair of 1/1 double-hung, wood sash windows capped by a multi-paned fanlight transom, which is framed by an ornate archivolt extending downward along each side of the window opening to become integral with the ornamental pilasters located on each side. A small raised parapet is located at the roof level above the canted corner.

The ground floor space, which originally featured showrooms on both the San Jacinto and Prairie Avenue facades, has housed a succession of different businesses, including several different auto companies, and has most recently housed a diner. The five ground floor store fronts have been partially enclosed during subsequent remodeling episodes that partially bricked the lower half of each store front and installed plate glass in the upper halves. The ground floor exterior is currently clad in textured stucco. Although a historic photograph of the building has not been located, it can be hypothesized that the original ground floor store fronts were similar in appearance to those located on the nearby Palace Hotel Building (216 LaBranch), constructed in 1903, which is very similar in age, style, massing, and historic use. The Palace Hotel building features a series of ground floor store windows with wood panels located on the lower third of each bay and large plate glass windows located above. Each bay is separated by a decorative, cast iron support column which was cast by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Houston firm, Hartwell Iron Works.

The exteriors of the second and third floors are clad with brown brick and separated from each other by a simple molded belt course executed in the same material. The second floor of the San Jacinto façade is five bays in width. Each window opening features a pair of 1/1 lite wood sash windows with a rectangular transom located above, except for the northernmost bay, which is comprised of a single, 1/1 wood sash window. The second floor of the Prairie Avenue façade is six bays in width with paired 1/1 lite wood sash windows similar to those used on the San Jacinto Street facade. The window bays along

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the Prairie Avenue facade alternate in height according to whether or not the window is capped by a rectangular transom. The westernmost paired window, closest to San Jacinto Street, is capped with a horizontal rectangular transom, which is followed by a paired window without transom, two pairs of windows with transoms, and another pair without. The easternmost terminus of the building, heading towards Caroline Street, features a paired window with rectangular transom.

The third floor of both the San Jacinto and Prairie Avenue facades feature an identical configuration of window bays as found on the second floor. The most notable difference, however, is the use of fanlight transoms over each window opening rather than the horizontally arranged rectangular transoms used on the second floor below. Each of the third floor window openings along the San Jacinto façade, with the exception of the northernmost single window as described on the second floor, features an ornate raised brick archivolt executed in contrasting light colored brick. Each arch, which is pierced by a large keystone, is contiguous with raised pilasters of the same light colored contrasting brick, which frame each window opening. The roof edge is also executed in the same light colored brick as used in the archivolts and pilasters located below.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

City of Houston, City Council minutes, 1904.

Stephen Fox & Gerald Moorehead, Houston Architectural Guide, AIA Houston; 1990.

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

Harris County Contract Records.

Harris County Mortgage Records.

Houston City Directories, 1870-1949.

United States Census, 1860, 1870, & 1880, Harris County, Texas.

Sanborn Maps, 1885, 1890, 1896, 1907, 1924.

Houston Daily Post, February 8 and 9, 1904.

Houston Daily Post, Tuesday November 29, 1904.

United States Social Security Death Index.

*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):

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- (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).

### AND

- 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 Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Anna Stabe Kerstings Building at 417-419 San Jacinto Street.

SITE LOCATION MAP  
ANNA STABE KERSTINGS BUILDING  
417-419 SAN JACINTO STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

