

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: James L. Autry House

OWNERS: W. Murray Air and Mary B. Air

APPLICANTS: Same

LOCATION: 5 Courtlandt Place – Courtlandt Place Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IV.d

HPO FILE NO: 09L217

DATE ACCEPTED: Mar-26-09

HAHC HEARING: May-21-09

PC HEARING: May-28-09

SITE INFORMATION

The East 50 feet of Lot 23 and West 75 feet of Lot 24, Courtlandt Place subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a wood-frame and brick two-story residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The James L. Autry House was designed by Sanguinet and Staats in 1912. It is an excellent example of Neo-Classical Revival architecture and reflects the elegance and architectural quality common along Courtlandt Place, one of Houston's earliest and most exclusive subdivisions. Established in 1906, Courtlandt Place, a tree-lined, divided boulevard, has maintained its residential integrity despite surrounding commercialism in adjacent blocks, and is designated as both a City of Houston and National Register historic district.

James Lockhart Autry was a significant figure in the early days of the Texas oil industry. As an attorney and judge, Autry was a pioneer in the field of oil and gas law. After the discovery of the Spindletop oil field in 1901, Autry helped Joseph Cullinan organize the Texas Fuel Company, now known as Texaco. In partnership with Cullinan and Will Hogg, Autry later formed several other oil companies. The Autry family was also community philanthropists, funding the children's wing of the Houston Tuberculosis Hospital among other endeavors. The Autry House Episcopal student center at Palmer Memorial Church adjacent to the Rice University campus was named in memory of James Autry.

The James L. Autry House at 5 Courtlandt Place is a contributing structure to the Courtlandt Place National Register and City of Houston Historic Districts. The James L. Autry House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The James L. Autry House, designed by Sanguinet and Staats in 1912, is an excellent example of Neo-Classical Revival architecture and reflects the elegance and architectural quality common along Courtlandt Place, one of Houston's earliest and most exclusive subdivisions. The Autry House is one of eighteen prominent residences facing Courtlandt Place Boulevard, a tree-lined, divided boulevard, which still retains the ambiance of its early 20th Century origins. Established as an exclusive neighborhood in 1906, Courtlandt Place has maintained its residential integrity despite surrounding commercialism in adjacent blocks. Six restrictive covenants, established in perpetuity and enforced by the owner-residents, form the basis for the neighborhood's continued survival. Courtlandt Place is a designated City of Houston and National Register Historic District.

James Lockhart Autry

James Lockart Autry was a significant figure in the early days of the Texas oil industry and his house on Courtlandt Place represents a period of personal professional and financial success. Autry was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, on November 4, 1859. In 1873, at the age of 15, he moved to Tennessee and enrolled in the college preparatory program at Sewanee University. In 1876, he left Tennessee and moved to Corsicana, in Navarro County, Texas, to oversee a land grant bequeathed to his family by his grandfather, Micajah Autry, who died in the battle of the Alamo on March 6, 1836. While in Corsicana, Autry apprenticed to study law under Judges Richard Channing Beale and Samuel R. Frost, and was subsequently admitted to the Texas Bar in 1880. In 1883, Judge Richard Beale's declining health led him to resign as judge in Navarro County, and Autry succeeded him as judge. In addition to serving as county judge, Autry was also director and president of the Texas Petroleum Oil Association in Corsicana.

In partnership with W. J. McKie, Autry served as counsel to Joseph S. Cullinan, a Pennsylvania oil entrepreneur who moved to Corsicana with the oil boom of the 1890s. With the discovery of oil at Spindletop in 1901, Cullinan moved to Beaumont and Autry followed in 1904 to help Cullinan organize the Texas Fuel Company. In 1905 the company reorganized and expanded into the Texas Company (later known as Texaco) in which Autry was elected a director and became general counsel. Autry moved to Houston in 1908 when the Texas Company corporate offices moved to take advantage of other oil fields down the Gulf Coast, and within a few years Autry had built his home on Courtlandt Place. In 1913, Autry joined Cullinan and Hogg in resigning from the Texas Company to form several new companies including the Farmers Petroleum Company, the Fidelity Trust Company, America Petroleum Company, and Republic Production Company. Autry served as president of the Farmers Petroleum Company, president of Fidelity Trust Company, and vice-president and general counsel of the last two under the combined name of American Republic Company. Autry is considered a pioneer in the field of oil and gas law.

Autry and his wife, Allie Belle Kinsloe Autry, had two children, Allie "Sally" May Autry (1903-1998) and James "Jimmy" Lockhart Autry III (1899-1922). Jimmy Autry was president of the Houston Radio Club and held a General Amateur License 5ED. He was also a member of the Amateur American Relay League. Jimmy Autry's wireless 'plant' was located in the garden house attached to the greenhouse on the property to the east of the main house. This was the largest and strongest radio 'plant' in Houston. He was responsible for Route E Station 5 communicating between Chicago and the Gulf region by way of St. Louis, Little Rock, Dallas, and Houston. Autry was just a teen in 1916 when he alerted his neighbors on Courtlandt Place of the outbreak of World War I by firing his pistol into the air in the early morning hours of April 6 after being informed of this news via his wireless radio. He told the neighbors in advance he would use that signal so they knew what it meant. It is said that neighbors emerged from their homes, some in their nightclothes, and many of them in tears. Jimmy Autry died a few years later due to complications from surgery, and unfortunately was not around for the development of broadcasting.

James L. Autry, like so many of the wealthy Houstonians of the time, was involved in social clubs and philanthropic endeavors. He was a director of the Houston Chamber of Commerce and served on the Vestry of Christ Church. The Autry family funded the children's wing of the Houston Tuberculosis Hospital and were supporters of Rice University. Allie Belle Kinsloe Autry, James Autry's widow, gave a substantial sum of money toward the construction of Autry House, the Episcopal student center at Palmer Memorial Church adjacent to the Rice campus, in Houston in

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memory of her deceased husband. Autry Court arena at Rice University was dedicated to the memory of Allie Belle Autry by her daughter, Allie Mae Autry Kelley. The facility was renamed Tudor Fieldhouse in 2008.

Autry suffered a massive stroke in 1915 and spent the last five years of his life a semi-invalid. He died on September 29, 1920 in his Courtlandt Place home. His family remained in the house until selling it in 1938.

Sanguinet and Staats

Marshall R. Sanguinet and Carl G. Staats founded the architectural firm of Sanguinet and Staats in 1903 in Fort Worth, Texas. The firm rapidly expanded into one of the state's largest architectural practices and specialized in the design of early 20th century steel-framed skyscrapers. They designed a number of significant buildings in the area, including the Wilson Building in Dallas, the first eight-story building in Texas. The firm designed many of Texas' early skyscrapers, among them the tallest buildings in Fort Worth, Beaumont, Houston, Midland, and San Antonio, until their work was eclipsed by taller structures. The firm had branch offices in Dallas, Wichita Falls, San Antonio, Waco, and Houston and was among the first Texas architectural enterprises to have a statewide practice. In 1922, Wyatt C. Hedrick bought a partial interest in the firm and the name was changed to Sanguinet, Staats and Hedrick, with the Houston branch known as Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb, under the direction of R. D. Gottlieb, a limited partner. In 1926, the two founding partners retired and sold their share of the firm to Hedrick who continued to practice in Fort Worth and in limited partnerships in Houston and later in Dallas.

Courtlandt Place

Courtlandt Place was established as an exclusive neighborhood in 1906 by the Courtlandt Improvement Company. It was modeled on the "private place" suburban plan concept developed in St. Louis, Missouri. Eighteen houses, most built between 1910 and 1930 along the tree-lined, divided boulevard, provide excellent examples of early 20th century architectural styles, designed by well-known architects. One of the few old Houston subdivisions still intact, Courtlandt Place is protected by the supervision of the Courtlandt Association and its Board of Trustees, backed by six restrictive covenants established in perpetuity. Courtlandt Place is the oldest subdivision in Houston with its deed restrictions still in force, protecting it from the fate of surrounding areas now dotted with commercial enterprises. In addition to the architectural significance of the district, Courtlandt Place was the home of some of Houston's most prominent leaders – doctors, lawyers, oil men, lumbermen, and people who founded companies still prospering today.

Courtlandt Place was a development of the south 1/3 of Lot 23 containing 15, 474 acres and the adjoining fractional Lot 9 of Block 24 of the Fairgrounds addition. Before the turn of the century, the land surrounding and including Courtlandt Place was prairie and used primarily for farming. After the city annexed the land in 1903, developers began several subdivisions in this area including Avondale, Westmoreland, Montrose, and finally Courtlandt Place. Of these early 20th century developments, only Courtlandt Place remains intact. The neighborhood's urban-country origins are still evident in the stables behind many of the big houses and by the hitching posts in the front yards.

The boundaries of the Courtlandt Place Historic District are the alleys behind the houses on the north and south, Garrott Street on the west, and the access road of the Southwest Freeway on the

east. The original property lines for the Courtlandt Place addition followed these same boundaries with the exception of the east end, which was shortened in 1963 due to the expansion of the Southwest Freeway. Half of the vacant lot in the southeast corner was condemned and the landscaped, crescent-shaped entrance to Courtlandt Place at the east was destroyed in 1969 by an extension of the Southwest Freeway. However, the stones from the pillars and the wrought iron fences were saved. In 1974, with the city's approval, the Courtlandt Association landscaped the present east entrance to the Boulevard using some of the original stones and fencing.

Among the prominent residents who built homes on Courtlandt Place was the W. T. Carter family, members of which were successful lumbermen, real estate developers, and politicians. Another prominent family was the Clevelands. Other original residents included Sterling Myer, prominent attorney; C. L. Meuhaus, land investor; Underwood Nazro, head of the Houston office of Gulf Oil; Murray Jones, attorney and judge; J. M. Dorrance, cotton broker and shipper; E. L. Neville, partner in cotton with Dorrance, later the Board of Directors of the First National Bank of Houston; T. J. Donoghue, vice president of the Texas Company (now Texaco); and John W. Garrow and W. C. Hunt, who were both in the cotton business.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Designed in 1912 by Sanguinet & Staats, the James L. Autry House is a two-and-a-half story, wood frame Neo-Classical Revival House. The shape of the house is basically square with a one-story, balustraded porte cochere to the east, balanced on the west by a small one-story, balustraded sun room. Dominating the main façade is a double balustraded gallery across the entire front, supported on four massive two-story, fluted Doric columns. From the central bay, a one-story, semi-circular Doric entrance porch projects, accentuating the entrance. This main façade retains a strict symmetry displaying a central door with sidelights and transom on both floors, flanked by wide single-pane sash windows on each side. Corresponding French doors and plate glass windows are also incorporated into the second floor. The elevation is also classically framed by two-story fluted corner pilasters. A distinctive feature of the roofline is the wide eaves with coupled modillions spaced above the columns on the front and singly spaced at intervals on the rear. A hipped roof, broken by gables, dormers and exterior brick chimneys at the east and west sides, crowns the structure.

Distinctive interior elements include the 15-foot by 37-foot entry hall and receiving room. Oak wainscoting, oak ceiling beams whose central beam is arched, original brass sconces, an oak staircase lighted by an ornate leaded and beveled glass arched window, all embellish the formal reception area. The first floor also features a formal parlor, a carriage hall, a large wainscoted living room (originally serving as Mr. Autry's home office and library) with box beamed ceiling, an oak wainscoted dining room with box beamed ceiling and butler's pantry, a fernery/solarium with mullioned windows on three sides, a bedroom, kitchen, and breakfast room featuring French doors and transoms on the west and south sides. On the second floor at the top of the stairs is another receiving room, 18-foot by 27-foot. An original brass ceiling fan with tulip lights hangs from the center of the room. Bedrooms and bathrooms are on the second floor as well as a windowed sleeping porch which spans the entire width of the house at the rear. All main rooms on the first and second floors have pocket doors for privacy.

The Autry house has a full utilitarian basement with a concrete floor which, when constructed, had specially designed waterproofing for the walls and drainage. Such construction is considered very

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unusual for Houston. The basement contained a laundry room and coal room and a large coal burning furnace which delivered forced air heating through duct work built into the home.

To the rear of the house is a two-story garage with space for three cars, a chauffeur's room, a workroom, and a storage closet. There is a 'pit' in the floor so that the chauffeur could work under the cars. The second floor served as a quarters.

To the east of the house is an adjacent lot that originally contained tennis courts and a long rectangular greenhouse with an onion-shaped roof. In the late 1990s, the adjacent lot was sold, the greenhouse and tennis court were razed, and a new home (suitable to the character of the street) was constructed. A swimming pool was added to the east perimeter in the rear of the property. Routine maintenance, painting and landscaping have taken place over the years. The external structure of the home remains true to its 1912 origins with the exception of a balustraded widow's walk on the top-most flat portion of the roof, which has not been reconstructed as of this submission.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

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APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to landmark 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 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 (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);		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);		
<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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(6);		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present (Sec. 33-224(a)(7);		
<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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(8).		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(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 James L. Autry House at 5 Courtlandt Place.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
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NOT TO SCALE

