

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Jones-Hunt House

**OWNERS:** Michael and Patricia Heim

**APPLICANTS:** Same

**LOCATION:** 24 Courtlandt Place – Courtlandt Place Historic District

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

**AGENDA ITEM:** III

**HPO FILE NO:** 09L218

**DATE ACCEPTED:** May-21-09

**HAHC HEARING:** Jun-18-09

**PC HEARING:** Jun-25-09

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 13, Courtlandt Place Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick residence and a two-story carriage house.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Jones-Hunt House, designed by Alfred C. Finn and built between 1919-21, reflects the elegance and architectural quality characteristic of Courtlandt Place, one of Houston's earliest and most exclusive subdivisions. The house was built by Sarah Brashear Jones, whose parents were early Houston settlers. Sarah Brashear and her husband, Col. James Warren Jones, who served in the Texas State Senate, were prominent in political and social affairs in Houston in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. James and Sarah's daughter, Irene Jones Hunt, inherited the house in 1925. Her husband, W. C. Hunt, was prominent in the shipping business, and the couple was active in Houston's community and social life. Their daughter, Effie Hunt Heald, inherited the house at her mother's death in 1973 and owned the house until 1989.

Alfred C. Finn, the architect for the house, is one of the most significant architects of Houston's past. Some of Finn's works include the San Jacinto Monument and Museum (1939), the Gulf Building (1929), the Metropolitan Theater (1926), and the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall (1937). The Jones-Hunt House was Finn's only design in Courtlandt Place for which he was solely responsible.

The Jones-Hunt house is a two-story brick house, rectangular in form with a two-story off-center entrance portico and a wide central gable facing the street. A porte cochere extending from the west forms the only wing. Before building the house on Courtlandt Place, Sarah and Col. Jones lived in an 1890 Victorian house at Main and Dallas streets downtown. When the new Courtlandt Place house was being built, the downtown house was dismantled and much of its Victorian woodwork – paneling, doors, and a beautiful open staircase – was incorporated into the new house.

The Jones-Hunt House is individually listed on the National Register, is a contributing structure to the Courtlandt Place National Register and City of Houston Historic Districts, and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

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## HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Jones-Hunt House, designed by Alfred C. Finn and built between 1919-21, reflects the elegance and architectural quality characteristic of Courtlandt Place, one of Houston's earliest and most exclusive subdivisions. Architect Finn worked as an associate with Sanguinet and Staats in 1912 when they designed the James L. Autry House at 5 Courtlandt Place (COH Landmark, pending), but the Jones-Hunt House was the only design in the neighborhood for which Finn was solely responsible. The house has a unique importance to the neighborhood as the only residence to be owned and occupied continuously by the same family for over 70 years.

The house at 24 Courtlandt Place was built by Sarah Brashear Jones. Sarah Brashear and her parents were among the earliest Houston settlers moving from North Carolina and Tennessee in 1839 to Houston. Her father, Isaac Brashear, became an extensive land owner, at one time owning most of the large tract of downtown property that became known as Houston Heights. In 1875, Sarah Brashear married Col. James Warren Jones of Clarksville, Tennessee, a lawyer who had moved to Houston in 1870. Col. and Mrs. Jones were prominent in political and social affairs in Houston in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Col. Jones served for six years as a member of the Texas State Senate and was on the committee in the late 1890s that went to Washington to secure an appropriation for the construction of the Houston Ship Channel.

Col. and Mrs. Jones built a Victorian residence downtown at Main and Dallas (later the site of Sakowitz Department Store) in 1890. By 1919, however, this land had become prime commercial real estate and residences were being torn down to accommodate new businesses. Sarah Jones decided to build a new house on Courtlandt Place, and was particularly interested in the site because in 1917, she had constructed a house next door at 22 Courtlandt Place (1917, Birdsall Briscoe) for her son, Murray B. Jones, whose wife was a daughter of the illustrious lawyer, James A. Baker. Sarah Jones had most of the interior woodwork removed from the old Main Street house before its demolition to incorporate into her new house at 24 Courtlandt Place. The paneling, the doors and the beautiful open staircase in the new house were all originally part of the Victorian residence. The open straight stair, which features three half-turns and landings, is beautifully spotlighted in the side entrance hall.

In 1925, Irene Jones Hunt, James and Sarah's daughter, inherited the house. Her husband, W. C. Hunt, was prominent in the shipping business as the manager for a European shipping company. The couple was active in Houston's community and social life. Their daughter, Effie Hunt Heald, who lived in the house for most of her life, inherited the house at her mother's death in 1973 and owned the house until 1989.

### *Alfred Finn*

Alfred Charles Finn, the architect of the house at 24 Courtlandt Place, was born in Bellville, Texas, on July 2, 1883, the son of Edwin E. and Bertha Rogge Finn. He grew up in Hempstead, Texas, where he attended public schools. In 1900, he moved to Houston and worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad as a carpenter, then as a draftsman. Between 1904 and 1913, Finn was employed by the architects Sanguinet and Staats, first in Dallas (1904-07), then in the firm's head office in Fort Worth (1907-12), and finally in its Houston office (1912-13). Finn began independent practice in Houston in 1913. His first job was to supervise construction of the Rice Hotel, designed by the St. Louis architects Mauran, Russell, and Crowell, for the Houston entrepreneur, Jesse H. Jones. This began his life-long association with Jones, Houston's foremost

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real estate developer and builder. During the first years of his practice, Finn designed a variety of building types. These included the ten-story Foster Building (1914) for newspaper publisher Marcellus E. Foster, and the adjoining Rusk Building (1916) for Jesse Jones; large houses for Sid Westheimer (1920) and Walter W. Fondren (1923) in Montrose, Earl K. Wharton in Shadyside (1920), and Sarah Brashear Jones at 24 Courtlandt Place (1921); the Humble Oil and Refining Company's first retail service station (1918, demolished); the Melba Theater in Dallas (with W. Scott Dunne, 1921, demolished) for Jesse H. Jones and John T. Jones, and buildings in Shreveport, Wharton, Bellville, and Sealy.

By the mid-1920s Finn had become Houston's leading commercial architect, producing skyscraper office buildings, hotels, retail stores, and theaters in the downtown business district. For Jesse Jones, he designed a seventeen-story addition to the Rice Hotel (1926), the sixteen-story Lamar Hotel and adjoining Metropolitan Theater (1926; demolished), the Loew's State Theater (1927; demolished), and the tallest building constructed in Texas in the 1920s, the thirty-seven-story Gulf Building (1929, with Kenneth Franzheim and J. E. R. Carpenter). Finn's office produced the eleven-story Kirby Building (1927) for John H. Kirby; large houses for William L. Moody III in Galveston (1927) and Ross S. Sterling at Bay Ridge (1928), and such institutional buildings as the Houston Light Guard Armory (1925), the Pilgrim Building (c. 1928, demolished), and St. Paul's Methodist Church (1930). His firm collaborated with the Fort Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick on the Worth Hotel and Worth Theater (1928), the eighteen-story Electric Building and Hollywood Theater (1929), and the nineteen-story Fair Building (1930) in downtown Fort Worth. Finn's office designed major buildings in Galveston and Brenham. During the early years of the Great Depression, Finn was able to secure such substantial commissions as the Forest Hill Abbey mausoleum in Kansas City, Missouri (1931), and the fifteen-story Peoples National Bank Building in Tyler (1932).

Coinciding with Jesse Jones's move from business into government in the 1930s, Finn obtained some of the most prominent publicly financed building commissions in Texas. Under the auspices of the Public Works Administration, his office designed the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall (1937), the twelve-story Jefferson Davis Hospital (1937, with Joseph Finger), the United States Post Office, Courthouse, and Customhouse in Galveston (1937, with Andrew Fraser), a twelve-building dormitory complex at Texas A&M College (1940), and the 570-foot tall San Jacinto Monument (1939). He was appointed to the board of Reconstruction Finance Corporation and went on to serve as FRA's secretary of commerce from 1940 to 1945. Subsequently, Finn became an architectural supervisor for the Federal Housing Administration. During World War II, Finn designed the 1,000-bed, 37-building U.S. Naval Hospital complex in Houston (1945, subsequently the Veterans Administration Hospital, demolished). Finn's office participated in the postwar building boom that occurred in Houston, designing the twenty-four-story City National Bank Building for Judge James A. Elkins (1947), the Ezekiel W. Cullen Building at the University of Houston (1950), the downtown specialty store of Sakowitz Brothers (1951), and the suburban headquarters building of the Great Southern Life Insurance Company (1952). It also produced the ten-story First National Bank Building in Longview (1956). Finn designed two hospitals in the Texas Medical Center, the Arabia Temple Crippled Children's Hospital (1952) and Ben Taub Hospital (1963, with H. E. Maddox and C. A. Johnson). Controversy in 1953 over an earlier version of what became Ben Taub Hospital led to serious financial reversals for Finn, after he was unable to collect fees for preparing a full set of construction documents. This was followed by a stroke he suffered in December 1953 that left

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him partially paralyzed. Finn maintained his practice until his death, but his participation in its day-to-day operations was limited.

Finn's architecture was stylistically conservative. It was abreast of current trends, but never at the forefront. After the late 1910s Finn seems to have delegated design responsibility to his associates, notably H. Jordan MacKenzie, who had a significant independent career in New Orleans between 1904 and 1916. MacKenzie worked with Finn between 1920 and 1940. Victor E. Johnson, who was with Finn between 1928 and 1952, also did design work, as did Robert C. Smallwood, who was in the office between 1923 and 1928. Other longtime associates were Milton R. Scholl, J. Russ Baty, and Ernest L. Shult. Finn's eldest son, Alfred C. Finn, Jr., joined the firm in 1934. Finn served twice as a trustee of the Houston Independent School District. He was also a member of the first City of Houston Planning Commission. Finn belonged to the Gray Lodge No. 329, the York and Scottish Rite bodies, the Arabia Temple Shrine, the Rotary Club, and the Houston Club. He joined the American Institute of Architects in 1920 and was elected to fellowship in the institute in 1949. Finn was a member of St. Paul's Methodist Church. In 1909, he married Mary Elizabeth Riley, and they had two sons. Alfred C. Finn died in Houston on June 26, 1964, and is buried in Forest Park Cemetery. His papers are deposited at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center of the Houston Public Library.

### *Courtlandt Place Historic District*

Courtlandt Place, established as an exclusive neighborhood in 1906, maintains its unique early 20th century elegance and continuity. Eighteen houses built mainly in the 1910s and 1920s along a tree-lined, divided boulevard, reflect excellent examples of early 20th century architectural styles, designed by some of the most prominent Texas architects of the early twentieth century, including Birdsall P. Briscoe, Alfred Finn, John Staub, Sanguinet and Staats, and Olle J. Lorehn. The eighteen houses built between 1909 and 1937 represent the popular architectural styles of the period – Classical Revival, Mediterranean, Tudor Revival, Georgian Revival, Colonial Revival, and Prairie Style.

Before 1900, 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 – Westmoreland (1902), Courtlandt Place (1906), Avondale (1907), and Montrose (1911). Of these early 20th century housing developments, Courtlandt Place was the most exclusive. The neighborhood's urban/country origins are still evident in the stables behind many of the large houses and by the hitching posts in the front yards. None of the houses have been destroyed or significantly altered and the street retains a rare and remarkable early 20th century ambience.

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. Among the prominent residents who built homes on Courtlandt Place were the W. T. Carter family - W. T. Carter, Sr., W. T. Carter, Jr., Jim and Lena Carter Carrol, Dr. and Jesse Carter Taylor, R. D. Randolph and

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Frankie Carter Randolph; the A. S. Cleveland family – A. S. Cleveland, and Cleveland's daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Kirkland; James Lockhart Autry; Sterling Myer; C. L. Neuhaus; Underwood Nazro; Murray Jones; J. M. Dorrance; E. L. Neville; T. J. Donoghue; John W. Garrow; and W. C. Hunt.

The landscaped, crescent-shaped entrance to Courtlandt Place at the east was destroyed in 1969 by an extension of the Southwest Freeway, although stones from the pillars and the wrought iron fences were saved and reused in the present east entrance. With encroaching commercial development in the surrounding neighborhoods, Courtlandt Place has become a quiet residential island surrounded by the freeway, busy thoroughfares, and businesses. Courtlandt Place was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, and was designated as a City of Houston Historic District on June 12, 1996.

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

Designed in 1919 by Alfred C. Finn, the Jones-Hunt House was planned to incorporate portions of an 1890 Victorian house into its interior. The two-story brick residence is basically rectangular in form with a two-story, off-center entrance portico on the south (front) and a wide central gable facing the street. A porte cochere extending from the west forms the only wing. The stepped plan of the house, which exhibits nominal Tudor detail, enables the principal living areas to have access to the prevailing southwest breeze.

The south facade consists of a three-bay composition with an off-center entrance on the west. Extending from the west bay is a two-story brick portico supported by massive, unadorned, two-story square columns. The brick gallery openings at both the first and second floors are linteled, but on the first floor, wooden molded spandrels, springing from pilasters engaged to the inside of the piers, form elliptical arches on all three sides of the portico. Surrounding the second-floor balcony is a brick balustrade with an open cross design and a coping defined by the vertical arrangement of brick stretchers. The vertical stretchers also form a stringcourse between the first and second floor. A three-part window with wide central panes pierces each floor of the central bay, the first-floor window being slightly larger in scale than the second-floor window. The east bay, enclosing a sunroom on the first floor, displays French doors with sidelights and transom, while a triple window provides light to the second-floor room. The roofline consists of wide eaves, a large central gable extending within a few feet of each side of the main facade, and a brick parapet surrounding the remainder of the south roof and part of the sides.

The east side also has a three-bay composition, the central portion of which is set back slightly. As on the main facade and throughout the house, the design features a variety of openings, corresponding to interior room use, rather than exterior arrangement. Within the recessed bay are double French doors with sidelights that lead from the dining room to the landscaped brick courtyard.

On the west extends a two-story brick wing with the porte cochere on the first level and an enclosed room on the second. The details of the porte cochere, with massive brick supports and elliptical arches formed by wooden spandrels, are similar to the front portico. The driveway of the Jones-Hunt House is unique on the boulevard, for the entrance begins to the west on a side street (Taft Street), rather than on Courtlandt Place. To the rear (north) of the house is a large two-story brick garage with room for three cars and servants quarters on the second floor.

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Most of the interior woodwork from the 1890 house on Main and Dallas was removed from the old house before its demolition in 1919 and incorporated into the Courtlandt Place house. The paneling, the doors, and the beautiful open staircase were all part of the Victorian residence. The open straight stair, which features three half-turns and landings, is beautifully spotlighted in the side entrance hall.

A Certificate of Appropriateness was approved in July 17, 1997, for restoration work to the house, including restoration of the roof from composition shingles back to the original slate; repair or replacement of wood trim; removal of brick infill to reopen original window openings; restoration of glass transoms; repair of the foundation; and replacement of broken veranda tiles with stone pavers. A two-story 'library' addition to the rear of the house was also approved, but was never built.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Fox, Stephen. Houston Architectural Guide, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, AIA Houston, p. 71.

Handbook of Texas Online, 'Finn, Alfred Charles',  
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/FF/ffi32.html>, accessed June 15, 2009.

Houston Architectural Survey, 1984.

National Register nomination, Jones–Hunt House.

National Register nomination, Courtlandt Place Historic District.

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

### **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**

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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));

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- (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 Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Jones-Hunt House at 24 Courtlandt Place.

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JONES-HUNT HOUSE  
24 COURTLANDT PLACE





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SITE LOCATION MAP  
JONES-HUNT HOUSE  
24 COURTLANDT PLACE  
NOT TO SCALE

