

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Meldrum House
OWNER: Carla Knobloch
APPLICANT: Same
LOCATION: 2411 Stanmore Drive – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: II.
HPO FILE NO: 12L266
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-22-2012
HAHC HEARING: Jun-14-2012

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 22, Block 41, River Oaks Sec. 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, brick residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Meldrum House at 2411 Stanmore Drive in River Oaks was built in 1941. The original owners, C.B. and Gladys Meldrum, lived in the house until 1987. C.B. Meldrum was an electrician and owner of his own business, Meldrum Electric Company, and Gladys Meldrum was a Spanish teacher who taught at numerous Houston junior high schools.

The Meldrum House is a two-story shingle-clad Colonial Revival style house, and is one of seven houses sited around a horseshoe-shaped court on Stanmore Drive. The River Oaks Corporation saw the Courts as a way to deal with problematic house sites that would otherwise face the heavily traveled San Felipe Road. This unique development plan drew local and national attention; articles were published in *Good Housekeeping* and the *Houston Post* extolling the benefits of the design.

The Meldrum House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Curtis and Gladys Meldrum

The *River Oaks Magazine* announced the arrival of the Meldrum family to River Oaks in November, 1941, with the following article:

“The new home built by Mr. and Mrs. C.B. Meldrum is Early American in type, of clapboard and shingle construction. The combination of white clapboard, cool gray for the shingles, and a natural shingle roof, is most pleasing and lends itself to the informality of the type. Carriage lights and curving black iron handrails at the low-set, recessed doorway, are other good points. Little Margaret Ann, age 5, is the daughter of the house. Mr. Meldrum is owner of the Meldrum Electric Company, Electrical Contractors.”

Curtis Meldrum was born on March 15, 1904, and raised in Houston by his widowed mother, who worked as a dressmaker. She raised four children on her own; they were all sent out in their early teens to work in business or trades. Curtis became an electrician and was successful early in life, working his way up from helper to foreman at the Jacobe Brothers Electrical Company to owning his own electrical contracting business. He built a one-story duplex at 1113-1115 Marconi Street near River Oaks in 1930 when he and Gladys married. They lived there until the mid-1930s,

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

moving to a home on Marconi Street. The Meldrums moved to their home in River Oaks in 1941. Curtis lived in the house until his death July 9, 1975, and Gladys lived in the house until she sold it in 1987, a total of 46 years.

Gladys Woolley Meldrum was born January 10, 1904, in Neuville, Texas to O.S. and Virginia Margaret Woolley. She grew up in East Texas, and attended schools in Center and Longview. She attended Southern Methodist University on an academic scholarship. She graduated from the University of Texas and worked on her Master degree in Spanish in Mexico City and Austin. She moved to Houston in 1927, and taught Spanish for the next fifteen years at Hogg, Jackson, and Hamilton Junior High schools. At her death in 2000, she had been a member of Bering Methodist Church and St. Luke's Methodist Church, and a member of the Phi Mu and Zeta Tau Alpha Mother's Clubs, College Women's Clubs, and the Spanish Club. Mrs. Meldrum sold the home in 1987, and it has had four owners since that time.

The River Oaks Property Owners' (ROPO) plans library does not indicate who designed the Meldrum House, but when C.B. Meldrum built his duplex on Marconi Street, he served as the contractor for the job. It's possible that Meldrum also contracted the house at 2411 Stanmore, as he likely had numerous friends in the building business. In 1940, he shared an office at 611 Clay Avenue with a general contractor, Charles R. Berry, and a plumbing company, Swanson Plumbing.

River Oaks

When Will C. Hogg, Mike Hogg, and Hugh Potter began the development of River Oaks in 1923, it was with the intention of making it into a demonstration of the highest standards of modern community planning, a role model for the rest of Houston to follow. Will Hogg's ambitiousness and Hugh Potter's skillful management of River Oaks during its first thirty years made the community known nation-wide as a symbol of Houston. Since its creation, River Oaks has been published in national news, real estate, and design media, and has been the focus of scholarly analysis, in recognition of its significant contributions to the history of Houston and twentieth-century American elite suburban community development.

The creation of this type of subdivision was unique for Houston in many respects. The subdivision was laid out at what was then the far western edge of Houston. Prior to 1923, the majority of Houston's residential developments had occurred in a tight girdle around the downtown business district, such as Westmoreland (1902), Avondale (1907), Montrose (1911), Audubon Place (1906), Cherryhurst (1908), Binz, Southmore (1914), and Courtland Place (1906). River Oaks, however, was situated at the western city limits far away from other developments.

In addition, the developers broke with convention by laying out an organic pattern of roadways which lent a sense of spaciousness to the neighborhood, which was very different from the traditional Houston neighborhoods that followed a more rigid approach to development. These traditional neighborhoods used street grids which carved the land up into predictable square or rectangular blocks.

Stanmore Courts

The concept of the Stanmore Courts was conceived by the River Oaks Corporation as a way to avoid placing homes on the heavily traveled San Felipe Road. By turning homes inward around a

horse-shoe and thus in a sense creating a common front yard, the River Oaks Corporation was able to place more homes for sale.

The homes received a lot of notice and articles appeared in *Good Housekeeping* and the *Houston Post*. In February 1937, *Good Housekeeping* extolled the virtue of planned suburbs, and described the River Oaks Court homes:

“Today, fortunately, in many of our cities and towns “new developments,” as new community planning is often called, are to be found. Consider these carefully. Where large tracts of land are bought and planned for residential sections by a responsible real-estate company, your risks are lessened. Good developments have the proper restrictions in architecture, intercommunity planning, parkways, recreation centers for children, fine schools, churches, and even convenient shopping centers.

This month, we illustrate a group of moderately priced houses, built on a central court, in the beautiful River Oaks section of Houston, Texas, under the direction of Hugh Potter....Here are moderately priced houses, ideally planned, which are excellent examples of the importance of neighborhood. They are a part of a beautiful general plan, where the finest residences with the largest property are at the core or heart of some 1000 acres, graduating to smaller plots which come under the same fine restrictions, careful zoning, and good architectural and building standards. Notice the care with which the garage drives are kept to the back, adjoining a boulevard; notice the space between the houses and the privacy which each house enjoys, although sharing the charm of the trees, green grass and roses of the central court...

Thus we see that the restrictions, the zoning, the careful planning by real-estate developers to keep each small section a part of a beautiful whole, maintain property values and pleasant surroundings at a high standard through a period of years. This, then, establishes the fact – Neighborhood is of First Importance.”

On December 20, 1936, the *Houston Post* ran the following about the courts:

“River Oaks Corporation today presents something new in subdivision development and home building, an idea which relates land platting to home architecture. The above five homes have been completed, facing a private court on Stanmore drive. Each home is different in design, but there is architectural harmony within the group. The court idea presents a new defense from traffic hazards, especially where children are concerned. The property in the center of the court has been set aside and developed into a private park, utilizable as part front yard by all residents of the court. The homes were designed by Cameron D. Fairchild, Houston architect. Each has an electrically controlled heating system.”

In all, six courts were laid out on Stanmore Drive, and two similar courts were laid out on adjacent Sharp Place. These were developed throughout the late 1930s and the 1940s.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Meldrum home is sited facing slightly northwest on one of the Stanmore Courts. The home is two-story and is 2,884 square feet on an 11,145 square foot lot. The house is designed in the Colonial Revival style, and is entirely faced with shingles. The house has a three part front façade.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

The entry is located in the center of the façade, and consists of a wood and glass door surrounded by decorative molding and topped with ornate broken pediment. Above the entry on the second story is a 3-over-3 wood sash window with shutters. To the other side of the front door are 12-over-12 wood sash floor length windows with shutters. Above these windows are two 8-over-8 wood sash windows with shutters. The upstairs windows are set abutting the roofline of the house and there is a pediment that surrounds the home. The house has a side gabled roof, and a tall brick chimney is located on the west side of the house.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancestry.com

Houston City Directories

“Obituary for Gladys Woolley Meldrum” *Houston Chronicle*, February 12, 2000.

River Oaks Magazine, November 1941.

T.G.C.B., 1930.

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 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;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (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;
- (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;

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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;
- (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;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

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)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Meldrum House at 2411 Stanmore Drive.

EXHIBIT A - PHOTO



EXHIBIT B - SITE LOCATION MAP

