

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** T. J. Donoghue House  
**OWNERS:** Wang Investments Networks, Inc.  
**APPLICANT:** Anna Mod, SWCA  
**LOCATION:** 17 Courtlandt Place

**AGENDA ITEM:** C  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 15L306  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Feb-27-2015  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Mar-26-2015

### SITE INFORMATION

Lots 17 and Tracts B19 & D7, Courtlandt Place, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a 2½-story symmetrical brick house.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Thomas J. Donoghue, a Texas Company (Texaco) founder and executive, and his wife, Mary, built the house at 17 Courtlandt Place in 1915-16. Designed by noted New York architect Whitney Warren of the firm of Warren and Wetmore, it is an excellent example of Georgian revival architecture, and features wood and stone carvings by master artisan Peter Mansbendel. A part of the exclusive early 20th century Courtlandt Place neighborhood, the house remained in the Donoghue family until 1966.

The T. J. Donoghue House meets Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for Landmark designation of Section 33-224 of the Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The T. J. Donoghue House, built along Courtlandt Place in 1915-16, is one of 18 prominent residences facing an avenue which still retains the ambience of its early 20th century origins. Established as an exclusive neighborhood in 1906, Courtlandt Place, a tree-lined, divided boulevard, has maintained its residential integrity despite surrounding commercialism in adjacent blocks. Six restrictive covenants, established in perpetuity and enforced by a Board of Trustees of owner-residents, form the basis for the neighborhood's continued survival.

Designed by Warren and Wetmore of New York in 1915, the T. J. Donoghue House is a classic example of the Georgian Revival style. The 2 1/2-story symmetrical brick house with double pitched roof has a number of significant ornamental features.

The two-story brick Georgian carriage house reflects the neighborhood's original urban-country origins. The building was designed to house one carriage and provide a stable for the horses. The structure has been converted into a guest house. The ornate fence used to enclose the horses, now encloses the back.

Among the outstanding interior architectural features, the woodwork by Texas' famous woodcarver, Peter Mansbendel, is perhaps the most significant. Mansbendel was responsible for interior cornices, bases, columns and capitals, the staircase and the carved mantels of five of the six fireplaces. He served as consultant for all the woodwork and consulted with Warren and Wetmore on the window casings and door treatments. Other notable interior details include the bas-relief Adamesque ceiling design in the living room and the cut crystal door knobs throughout the house.

The Thomas J. Donoghue House is an excellent example of Georgian Revival architecture and reflects the elegance and architectural quality common along Courtlandt Place, one of Houston's earliest and most exclusive subdivisions. The New York firm of Warren and Wetmore, nationally prominent architects of the period, was the only non-Texas firm to design a house on the avenue. In addition, the house displays superior craftsmanship in the carved details by Peter Mansbendel, Texas' most famous 20th century wood carver. Finally, the house remains one of Houston's important historical landmarks, as the home for 30 years of Thomas J. Donoghue, one of Texas' earliest and most prominent oilmen.

### *Thomas Joseph Donoghue*

The owner and original builder of the house, Thomas Joseph Donoghue, was one of the early leaders in the Texas oil industry. Born in Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1869, Thomas J. Donoghue attended public schools in Titusville and Bradford, Pennsylvania. At the age of 15, Donoghue entered the pipeline department of the Standard Oil Company at Bradford, winning promotions in that and in the purchasing department. In 1901 he came to Corsicana, Texas, with J. S. Cullinan, and in 1902 he went to Beaumont and became one of the organizers of the Texas Company (later Texaco). In addition to being Treasurer from 1903 to 1907, Mr. Donoghue served as a member of the Board of Directors from 1902-1934, member of the Executive Committee and a director of its subsidiaries. When T. J. Donoghue retired from the Texas Company at the age of 70 in 1939, he was Executive Vice- President. In 1945, Donoghue died as a result of a fall. Mrs. Donoghue continued to live in their house on Courtlandt Place until her death in 1963. The house sold in 1965.

From 1913-1917, all building in Houston slowed as World War I began and construction stopped altogether from 1917-1918 after the United States joined the war. When it began again in the early 1920s, Houston joined the rest of the U.S. and the world in the effort to identify a modern style to accompany the many advancements of the twentieth century.

### *Warren and Wetmore*

The New York firm of Warren and Wetmore, best known for its 1903-13 design of the Grand Central Terminal in New York City, was hired in 1911 to design Houston's Union Station. When the firm returned in 1915 to design the Texas Company Building, Thomas J. Donoghue, first vice-president of the Texas Company, hired Warren and Wetmore to design a house for his family on Courtlandt Place. One of the country's renowned firms in the early 20th century, Warren and Wetmore were responsible for the designs of Grand Central Station, New York; Grand Trunk Station, Winnipeg Canada; the Ritz-Carlton and Belmont Hotels, New York; many private residences; the bronze gates at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; the Library of Louvain University; and many others.

### *Peter Mansbendel*

The most significant interior features of the Donoghue house are the carved woodwork and limestone by Peter Mansbendel. Born in Basle, Switzerland in 1883, Mansbendel began an apprenticeship to a local master carver at the age of 10. Six years later he entered the Industrial Arts School. After completing service in the Swiss army, Mansbendel traveled to London to study the carvings of Grinling Gibbons and then journeyed to Paris where he completed his formal education at the Coquier-Roland School of Art. In 1907 he immigrated to the United States, working first in Boston and then in New York, where he had charge of the woodcarving department of L. Marcotte and Co., an interior decorating firm. He also taught classes in clay modeling at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. In

New York he met Miss Clotilde Shipe of Austin, Texas, and followed her to Austin, marrying her in 1911. They returned to New York for a short while, but in 1915 decided to settle permanently in Austin.

In Texas, Mansbendel became known as the leading artist in his profession, and during the 1920s and 1930s prominent architects would summon him to put finishing touches on their most important projects. His fireplace mantels were especially popular. In addition to architectural detail work, he also created an array of furniture and household decorative items. Most of his work is concentrated in Austin, but additional examples rest in fashionable homes in Dallas and Houston. The intricately carved doors of the restored Spanish Governor's Palace and the Mission San Jose in San Antonio are his most public works. In addition, in the spacious lobby of the University of Texas Union, his handicraft is evident in the portrait plaques depicting former presidents of the University. Peter Mansbendel died of cancer on July 20, 1940.

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION HISTORY

### *Exterior*

On the main facade, the three-bay composition contains a central door with fanlight and sidelights and is sheltered by a semi-elliptical one-story portico. Tri-partite windows on either side of the entrance feature carved limestone lintels with relief ornament. Separated by a concrete stringcourse, the second floor displays decorative brick patterns between the three eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows.

One of the most noteworthy features is the double end chimney at the east and west gable ends of the house. The east chimney projects from the exterior wall forming a recessed area in the center, pierced by windows and terminating in an arch at the gable peak. The west wall chimney is enclosed. A Palladian window creates the focal point in the east and west gable ends.

At the attic level dormers with round arched, double-hung sash windows pierce the roof of the north (front) and south (rear) facades, lighting the elaborate third floor ballroom. Two tall slender chimneys rise from the south pitch of the roof.

To the east of the main block is a one-story loggia or piazza. Originally open, the wing contains a semi-elliptical arch on the north and south sides and three semi-elliptical arches along the east, all separated by Corinthian columns, identical to those supporting the front portico. In later years this portion was enclosed and air conditioned. A porte-cochere to the west forms a one-story shelter over a side entrance.

Across the rear facade (south) a two-story, flat-roofed wing with large square two-story columns defining the bays, originally displayed an enclosed first floor and screened-in porch on the second floor. The second floor gallery was later enclosed by glass and was air-conditioned.

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



# CITY OF HOUSTON

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## EXHIBIT A PHOTOS

T. J. DONOGHUE HOUSE  
17 COURTLANDT PLACE



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## EXHIBIT B SITE MAP

T. J. DONOGHUE HOUSE  
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