

3-11-98

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church

AGENDA ITEM: 10

OWNER: Antioch Missionary Baptist Church

PC MEETING DATE: Oct-02-97

APPLICANT: HAHC

HPO FILE NO.: 96LD37

LOCATION: 500 Clay Avenue, formerly known as 313 Robin Street

DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-15-97

30-DAY HAHC HEARING NOTICE: Aug-10-97

HAHC HEARING DATE: 9-11-97

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 3, 4, 7 and 8, Tracts 1 and 2, Block 3, Senechal Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a masonry, stucco clad church building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Antioch Missionary Baptist Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on December 22, 1976 (Reference No. 76002038). It was designated also as a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark on May 27, 1994. Antioch Baptist Church, organized in 1866 for emancipated slaves, houses the oldest Black congregation in Houston.

In January of 1866, just seven months after slaves were freed in Texas on June 19, 1865, a small group of freed slaves organized the first African American Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. They were assisted by the First Baptist Church and missionaries. After holding worship services at the First Baptist Church and the German Baptist Church, they held services on Buffalo Bayou in a "Brush Arbor." They moved to "Baptist Hill" located at Rusk and Bagby until the present site was purchased on Robin, now Clay Avenue. Services were conducted by ministers who traveled to different locations, at stated times.

In 1868, one of Antioch's members, Jack Yates, was ordained as a minister at the first Association meeting for African American Baptist Churches. The meeting was the first National Baptist Convention. Rev. Jack Yates became the first pastor of Antioch. As the membership grew and additional space was needed, Rev. Yates led the church to purchase its present site and build a new structure. The original red brick church was designed by Richard Allen, a black master builder and member of the Texas Legislature. Erected in 1875, this building was the first brick structure owned by African-Americans in Houston, Texas. The building features influences of the Gothic Revival style of architecture.

The first educational opportunity for freed African-Americans began at Antioch. Rev. Yates, with the help of two missionaries, began the Baptist Academy. The Baptist Academy not only taught reading, writing and arithmetic, but trades were also taught, for men and women to start their own businesses. The Baptist Academy later became Houston College, which was the forerunner of Texas Southern University. Economic development and recreational activities were also encouraged and supported at Antioch. Under Rev. Yates' leadership, members were encouraged and assisted in buying property, owning home and starting businesses. The Emancipation Park, in conjunction with Trinity Methodist Church, was purchased for recreation activities and community celebrations, such as the 19th of June or "Juneteenth."

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church building was significantly enlarged in 1895 by Robert Jones and has been expanded subsequently but sympathetically. Although it is surrounded by modern skyscrapers today, it remains in what was once the heart of the city's oldest black community, Freedmen's Town. Even the original handmade pews are still used in the church today.

At the public hearing of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) held on March 13, 1997, the HAHC discussed the matter regarding the expiration of the two-year temporary designation of all landmarks that City Council had previously designated when the Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted on March 1, 1995. Since the designation had expired, the HAHC requested that the planning staff contact the owners of these landmarks to determine their interest in the HAHC initiating an application for permanent designation. On June 3, 1997 a letter was sent to the owner who subsequently confirmed interest in the initiation of the application by the HAHC. The HAHC had advised the planning staff previously that if any landmark had been designated either by the National Register program, as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, a State Archaeological Site or a temporary landmark of the City of Houston, then the application would be considered by them for permanent landmark designation on that merit alone. Therefore, regarding the preparation of the application, HAHC agreed to consider the application with minimal information provided.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION....:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to 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 D NA

S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

- (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;

The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion "A" (Religious Properties) which includes **"significance under a theme in the history of religion having secular scholarly recognition; significance under another historical theme, such as settlement, or education; and significance associated with traditional cultural values."**

- (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;

The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion "C" which includes **"distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction."**

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.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on September 11, 1997, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission determined that the application complied with criteria found in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and recommended that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the HAHC and forward it to City Council for the designation of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and forward it to City Council for designation of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP
ANTIOCH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
500 CLAY AVENUE
NOT TO SCALE

