

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Three Oaks, Mr. & Mrs. H. Arch Spradley House

**AGENDA ITEM:** C

**OWNERS:** Mr. Christopher Knapp

**HPO FILE NO.:** HP2023\_0119

**APPLICANTS:** Same

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 05/2/2023

**LOCATION:** 2201 Albans Road, Houston, 77005

**HAHC HEARING:** 06/29/2023

**SITE INFORMATION:** Single story, 1,570 square foot brick, single-family house located on a 7,440 square foot corner lot, several blocks from Rice University. Lot 7, Block 29, Southampton Place. Built in 1929.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Southampton Place is celebrating its Centennial this year. The Henry Archibald Spradley House, known as Three Oaks, was one of the earliest homes built on Albans Road in Southampton in 1929. It is a red brick, Tudor style bungalow in excellent original condition. The home has had just two owners in its ninety-four-year history: the current owner and its original owner, Detective H. "Arch" Spradley and his wife, Gertrude Jacob. Arch Spradley, as he was known, was a prominent member of the City of Houston police force. He became a detective and a lieutenant during his forty-two-year career in law enforcement.

Southampton Place is located near Rice University, the Museum District and the Texas Medical Center. The developer E.H. Fleming purchased the land in 1922, and development began in 1923. The early deed restrictions that enforced the building of only single-family residences with required minimum setbacks helped ensure that the neighborhood still has a "1920s feel." The housing stock contains a variety of architectural styles including classical Georgian and Tudor Revival homes, as well as brick cottages and bungalows. However, historic houses in the neighborhood are increasingly being torn down. Many of the new, modern residences do not complement the neighborhood's historic character.

The current owner is seeking a Protected Landmark Designation for 2201 Albans in order to preserve the house, which contributes to the historic character of Southampton Place and is representative of the neighborhood's history.

Three Oaks meets criteria 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 for Landmark Designation and criteria 1 for Protected Landmark Designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

*SOUTHAMPTON PLACE*

In 1922, the developer E.H. Fleming purchased 160.75 acres from Mrs. Nellie B. League of Galveston for \$297,387.50. He originally planned a “residential and business” community on the acreage. During this early period, the basic deed restrictions (that would eventually become part of every deed for each piece of property sold) were established, and helped preserve the residential quality that the neighborhood continues to enjoy today. These restrictions included the prohibition of saloons, the sales of “spirituous liquors,” any “foundry, cemetery, reform school, asylum, slaughterhouse, or institutions for the treatment of tuberculosis or the mentally impaired.” Furthermore, no “prospecting, mining or drilling” would be permitted. Apartment buildings and multi-family housing were also prohibited. In addition, to ensure building quality, minimum construction costs were set: lots facing Rice Boulevard ranged from \$12,000-\$15,000, lots facing Sunset Boulevard were between \$8,000 to \$10,000 and all other lots between \$5,000-\$7,000.

A sales prospectus advertised Southampton as “A place to love to live in” in 1922. The booklet predicted “A community of beautiful homes, harmonious in every detail” and a “desirable environment.” At its inception, Southampton was bolstered by the advantage of being adjacent to the Rice Institute, which was the largest privately endowed college in the nation. The brochure promised Southampton residents a park and playground, a school site, transportation fund, paved alleys and sidewalks, trees and ornamental plantings, and utilities and adequate storm sewers, rather than open culverts or ditches. The idea of enforcing stringent restrictions to protect the future of a large residential community made up of single-family homes may have been the brainchild of E.C. Barkley, a co-worker of E.H. Fleming and a Vice President at the San Jacinto Trust Company, who became one of Southampton’s earliest residents.

Early residents built their homes in an irregular pattern extending southward from Bissonnet, leaving construction on Rice Boulevard last. The 1926 directory lists four homes on Bissonnet, six on Wroxton, nine on Albans and seven on Sunset. By 1928, the directory lists homes on all Southampton east-west thoroughfares. There were 144 homes combined on Bissonnet, Wroxton, Albans, Sunset, Quenby, Tangley, Robinhood, Dunstan, Bolsover and Rice Boulevard. A.E. Kerr, the first resident on Rice Boulevard, became the first president of the Southampton Civic and Improvement Club a year after purchasing his home.

The development in Southampton was mirrored in downtown Houston. In the late 1920s, Houston witnessed the biggest building boom in its history. This boom would not be duplicated for the next three decades. Progress was in the air, and Mr. Fleming built two sample homes on Sunset Boulevard in Southampton to demonstrate what could be done with modern devices and design. The homes were fully electrified, and a contemporary newspaper article announced that, “Everything...is electrical, bringing before the people of this city an opportunity to learn the many advantages this wonderful invention of science has brought to the present-day household.” Architect William Ward Watkin wrote in *Houston* magazine about this era, “The opportunity is here to make a city, growing as recently and rapidly as Houston is growing, one of the most beautiful cities in the country...I wonder if we are not at the beginning of an epoch in the history of our country when we are about to experience a very positive migration from the northern and north-central states to the south and toward the southwest.” By 2000, there were 601 homes in Southampton.

Tunnels of live oak trees along both Sunset and Rice Boulevards are a hallmark of Southampton. The trees create a shady canopy for the classical Georgian homes, brick cottages and bungalows found throughout the neighborhood. Alley access in the back of the houses allows for more green space out front. Fleming Park and the esplanades on Sunset Boulevard are maintained by a Friends of the Park group. The civic association actively defends deed restrictions within the neighborhood, which has helped the community maintain a consistent feel. The deed restrictions require minimum setbacks from the street and prohibit businesses within Southampton. The neighborhood's proximity to the Texas Medical Center, Rice University, Rice Village, the museum district and downtown (it sits about 5 miles southwest of downtown), along with its walkability and historic character, have contributed to a steady rise in property values.

Six years after Southampton was founded its civic club was organized. On May 24, 1929, twenty-two residents met at the Poe School to draft by-laws and a constitution. The club hoped to "work in a consolidated body to secure all the civic improvements to which a progressive community aspires." The club began addressing neighborhood problems that ranged from roaming livestock and the dumping of trash on vacant lots to loud noises from the carnival grounds nearby on Main Street. The Southampton Civic Club was part of developing the off-street parking, residential permit paring, cell tower, and Chapter 42 Houston ordinances. The club's vigilance about deed restrictions is largely responsible for preserving the neighborhood's original character.

*Henry Archibald "Arch" Spradley (b.5/4/1887, d.3/8/1972)*

Arch Spradley was born and raised in Nacogdoches County in 1887 to parents, Elias Isiah Spradley and Mary Elizabeth "Mollie" Moore. The couple had two children, Henry Archibald and sister, Ira Belle. His father passed away at age 27 in 1888. On November 14, 1889, Arch's mother, Mollie remarried Charles "Charley" Tilman Pullen. Together they had seven children. Charles Pullen was born in Putnam, Tennessee in 1839. Mr. Pullen was a farmer who did not attend school and was unable to read or write. He was a soldier in the Confederate Army and passed away on March 2, 1931.

Like his father, Arch began farming at a young age. In the 1900 Census, Arch is listed as a farm laborer at age thirteen. He received a limited formal education. His World War I Draft Registration Card noted that the third and fourth finger on his left hand were partially missing and that his sight was compromised.

From 1913 through 1917, Arch lived at the Hotel Stratford and was already working as a Houston policeman. In 1917, he lived at 2411 Caroline Street and had advanced to detective in the City of Houston Police Department. From about 1923-25 Arch was living at the Milby Hotel.

Arch met and married Gertrude Jacob on January 21, 1926, in Jefferson, Texas. Three years later, Arch purchased the home at 2201 Albans. Harris County tax records show that the building permit was issued in March 1929. The *Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletin* for August 1929 contains the citation for Arch Spradley awarding a \$5,200 contract to L. R. Ashmore to build a one-story, 31-foot by 50-foot brick veneer residence.

At the time, Mr. Spradley was working in the auto theft division of the Houston police force. He eventually became the head of the department. Throughout Arch's career his cases were detailed in the Houston

Chronicle and a few interesting cases were briefly described in the book, *A Texas Sheriff, A.J. Spradley*. A.J. Spradley was Arch's uncle and the renowned sheriff of Nacogdoches County for thirty-five years.

The book explains that after about twenty-five years on the police force, Arch Spradley was "one of the special criminal investigators in the office of Sheriff Binford." It continues, "Mr. Spradley has been engaged in unraveling a large number of bad cases."

The volume contains a chapter entitled "Famous Houston Detective," about Arch. In the chapter he is described as "a most valuable member of the Houston detective force" The author adds that Arch was the "son of Mr. and Mrs. Elias Spradley, two well-known Nacogdoches County citizens."

The book continues, "his education was limited, and he is largely a self-made man. He went to Houston...and was employed in the police department where his splendid work quickly attracted the attention of the chief and since that time his promotion has been an acknowledgement of his ability as an officer."

Arch Spradley's retirement from the Houston Police Department was a feature in the May 1, 1953, edition of the Houston Chronicle entitled, "Party Honors Lt. Spradley." Police headquarters hosted a joint retirement party and 65<sup>th</sup> birthday party for Arch after forty-two years of service on the force.

*Gertrude Jacob Spradley (b.10/18/1898, d.1/29/1992)*

Gertrude Jacob was born and raised in Houston. As a young girl she lived at 1610 Pierce Avenue in Houston's Third Ward with her parents and older sister, Clydelle. Her father, C.A. Jacob was a Texas native and mother, Lottie was born in Missouri. Gertrude completed two years of high school and began working as a clerk.

Houston city directories indicate that Gertrude was living at the Hotel Bender on 917 Austin Street and was employed as a clerk in 1917. By 1920, Gertrude was living at 1409 Eagle Avenue. Six years later, on January 21, 1926, she married Henry Archibald Spradley. They moved to the house at 2201 Albans Street in 1929.

Gertrude was an avid collector of American antiques. Her impressive collection was featured in the June 1955 edition of *Antiques* magazine. Mrs. Spradley's collection has been compared to Ima Hogg's famous collection of American decorative arts and antiques from 1620-1870, displayed at Bayou Bend in Houston. Gertrude also had an extensive couture collection. When she sold 2201 Albans to the current owner, the antiques were included in the sale. Mrs. Spradley passed away on January 29, 1992, at the age of ninety-four.

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

Three Oaks is a single-story, red and black brick veneer, Tudor style house that is in excellent original condition.

The property was named Three Oaks by the original owners for the three specimen live oak trees that grace the property. A photo of the house dating from nearly fifty years ago, in 1975, shows that the three trees were already prominent features of the property. The home is situated beside two oaks located within the eastern side yard and one directly in front of the house. The large oaks and their horizontal branches create a shady canopy under which the house is shielded from the Texas sun.

As is typical of Tudor style houses, the façade of Three Oaks is asymmetrically arranged. A large, arched, screened opening spans the left side of the house. A deep screened porch is situated at the front, eastern side of the home.

In the middle of the façade, an oversized picture window comprised of three pairs of casement windows is centered beneath the peak of a front-facing gable. A shallow, curved, aged copper roof with a scalloped edge sits above the picture window.

The front entry is positioned to the right of the oversized window. Brick steps lead to the original heavy, wooden front door adorned with aged hardware. Above the door, a curved copper roof is supported by curving iron brackets. The roof's scalloped edge matches the roof above the neighboring picture window.

On the house's right hand, western side, a prominent chimney bisects a side-gabled roof.

The house was built on an oversized corner lot. A modern cedar fence with horizontal slats stretches along its east side, facing Shepherd Drive. The front fence, facing Albans Road, is constructed with iron rails. Entry into the garden surrounding the house is gained through a decorative iron double gate. On both the left and right gates a large "S" (for Spradley) is centered within the vertical iron rails. A whimsical, decorative iron arch with symmetrical curlicues adorns the entry. The iron arch is supported on each side of the gate by substantial sandstone pillars. A path constructed of irregularly shaped flagstone leads from the gate to the front entry.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

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Fuller, Henry C., *A Texas Sheriff, A Brief History of A.J. Spradley. "Famous Houston Detective."*







## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Three Oaks, Mr. & Mrs. H. Arch Spradley House at 2201 Albans road

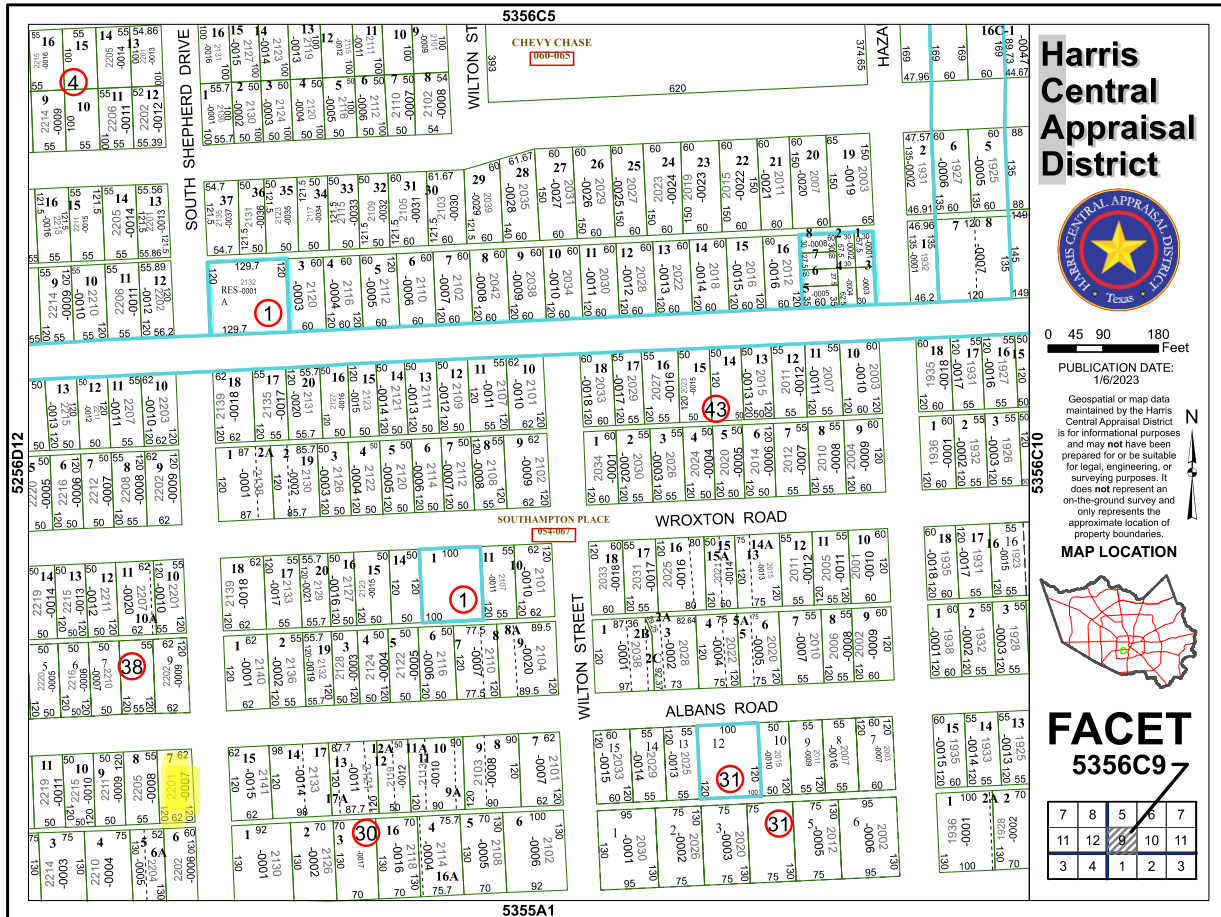
## **HAHC RECOMMENDATION**



**EXHIBIT A  
PHOTO  
2201 ALBANS, 1975**



## EXHIBIT B 2201 ALBANS, FACET MAP





**EXHIBIT C**  
**PHOTO, 2201 ALBANS**  
**2023**

