

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Raymond and Daisy Powell House

**OWNERS:** Kelley and Donald Young

**APPLICANTS:** Same

**LOCATION:** 3640 Piping Rock, River Oaks

**AGENDA ITEM:** Iie

**HPO FILE NO:** LM239

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jan-10-2011

**HAHC HEARING:** May-19-2011

**SITE INFORMATION:** Tracts 20 & 21a Block 68, River Oaks Section 8, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, brick veneered, single-family residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Raymond and Daisy Powell House at 3640 Piping Rock was built in 1940-41 by W. E. White, an active River Oaks builder, as a speculative home. Since its completion, the home has been owned by only three families – the Powells, the Knolle/Andrews, and the Youngs. The original owner, Raymond E. Powell, was a retired superintendent of the Baytown Refinery of the Humble Oil and Refining Company.

The William. E. White homes in River Oaks were typically traditional in style, generally three bedroom and two bath in size, and affordable to a mid-level buyer. Among W. E. White's buildings outside of River Oaks are the North Boulevard Manor Apartments at North Boulevard and Hazard, which are contributing structures to the Boulevard Oaks Historic District, and three houses in the Boulevard Oaks Historic District, two of which still stand and are contributing to the district.

The two-story brick house is built in the Neoclassical style. Its most prominent feature is a front gabled, full-height portico contains four square columns with Doric capitals.

The Raymond and Daisy Powell House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The house at 3640 Piping Rock was built as a speculative home in 1940-41 by W. E. White, a local builder. Raymond E. Powell and his wife, Daisy purchased the house in July 1941. On July 13, 1941, the following along with a photograph appeared in the Houston Chronicle:

*“Mr. and Mrs. Powell’s new residence – Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Powell have purchased this River Oaks home at 3640 Piping Rock from W. E. White, builder, for \$18,000 cash. The house has a third floor paneled in pecky cypress, with four bedrooms and two baths on the second floor and the usual service rooms downstairs, including a screed porch and powder room. The kitchen has metal cabinets and there is a built in bar on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor...Mr. Powell formerly was superintendent of the Baytown Refinery of the Humble Oil and Refining Company.”*

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Raymond E. Powell, the first owner of 3640 Piping Rock, was born on May 10, 1886, in Burlington, New Jersey, to Alfred and Lillie Havens Powell. The 1900 and 1910 Censuses show him residing in Mercer, New Jersey. By 1920, he was married to Daisy and living in Hudson, New Jersey. From the “History of Humble Oil & Refining Company,” we know that Powell came to Houston in 1921 to work with John Levi Finley who had been appointed as assistant to H. C. Weiss, the Vice President of Refining. Finley and Powell had worked together in Jersey Standard’s asphalt plant in Charleston, South Carolina. The book mentions that Powell had been working since 1907 in “various Jersey Standard and Imperial Oil refineries.”

On November 1, 1921, Powell was appointed assistant superintendent of the Baytown refinery. He was then appointed as superintendent two months later, a position he would hold for the next 14 years. There are some interesting passages in “History of Humble” relating to Powell’s management style:

*“Superintendent Powell was of the old school of managers who were familiar only with one-way communication with employees—the communication of orders and management decisions.” (1921)*

*“Powell, who for 13 years had been its chairman ex officio (of the Baytown Joint Conference), was an excellent superintendent of the old school, who ruled with an iron but impartial hand, administered discipline severely but impersonally, and despite his hardness, was on the whole popular with employees.”*

The book also describes Powell as an innovator in employee training, which had usually been accomplished on the job.

*“In 1927, Superintendant Powell initiated talks on refining and refinery management; and the next year he gave a course on foremanship, which was open to foremen, members of the Joint Conference, and apparently to other interested employees. These lectures in the 1920s were given on the initiative of refinery men and antedated Humble’s formal program for employee training.”*

The book refers to the years 1926 through 1929 as a “golden age in Humble’s refining.” As superintendent, Powell was pivotal in the growth at Baytown.

*“The years 1926-1929 constitute a particularly significant period in Humble’s refining history, especially at Baytown. These years were marked by an increase in capacity, by improved economy of operation and quality of products, and by a generally high level of profits.”*

It appears that Powell stepped down as superintendant of Baytown in January 1935 due to reasons of “ill health.” It was after his retirement that he and Daisy moved from Baytown to the home on Piping Rock. The Powells would remain in the home for approximately 30 years; for many of these years Daisy lived in the home alone as a widow. By 1971, the home was purchased by Dr. Guy Knolle and his wife, Marilyn. Following a divorce, Marilyn Knolle (later Andrews) would remain in the home. In 2009, Marilyn Andrews sold to the current owners, Donald and Kelley Young.

## *William E. White*

William E. White was a builder active in River Oaks in the 1930s and 1940s. He first appears in the 1935 directory listed with his wife, Kathryn, at 1627 Colquitt. By 1936, the White Construction Company is listed at his residence at 5327 Cherokee, where he would remain for the next 44 years. The company continues to appear through the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. In 1973, his profession is listed as “Investments and Real Estate” and, by 1977, he is listed as retired and still married to Kathryn. A Houston Post ad placed on January 24, 1938 touted apartments that he had recently constructed, the North Boulevard Manor, at North Boulevard and Hazard. These apartments are contributing structures in the Boulevard Oaks Historic District. The ad describes him as the builder/owner of White Construction Company. The houses at 1652 North Boulevard (1934; demolished), 1646 South Boulevard (1934-35; contributing) and 1626 South Boulevard (1935; contributing) in the Boulevard Oaks Historic District are also attributed to White; doubtless he was completing homes in several of Houston’s best neighborhoods during this period.

The William E. White homes in River Oaks were traditional in style, generally three bedroom and two bath in size, and affordable to a mid-level buyer. The River Oaks Property Owners Card Files identify the following homes, all of which are still standing. The building dates are taken from Harris County Assessor’s District and are estimates.

- 3232 Avalon Place, 1932
- 3702 Del Monte, 1945
- 2154 Inwood, 1935
- 2241 Inwood, 1934
- 2433 Inwood, 1945
- 3662 Olympia, 1940
- 3838 Olympia, 1941
- 2404 Pelham, 1931
- 2521 Pelham, 1936
- 3444 Wickersham, 1938

## *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

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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.

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

3640 Piping Rock is built in the Neoclassical style. The painted brick, two-story house has three main bays and two lesser bays. The central three bays make up the bulk of the house, while the smaller side bays are setback on both ends of the house.

The home's main feature is a front gabled, full-height portico extending from the central bay. The portico contains four square columns with Doric capitals and is topped by an entablature with dentil molding. The entablature runs around the perimeter of the house. The centered entry way contains a six-panel wooden door with sidelights and a transom punctuated by arched window openings. A wooden entablature and pilasters surround the door and lights. Above the doorway on the second floor is a small six-over-six sash window with an iron grill attached over the bottom half of the window.

The west and east main bays of the house each contain an eight-over-eight window on the first floor and a four-over-four window above it on the second floor. All windows on the front façade's three main bays contain wooden shutters painted black.

There is brick quoining on the ends of the home. A side gabled roof covers the house. The roof is clad in asphalt shingles. Two original projecting dormer windows punctuate the façade. The windows in these dormers are three-over-three wooden sash windows. The surround for the windows contain pilasters and an arched entablature.

The far bays on either side of the house are minimally seen from the street. The east bay has been altered, as the window in the front facade is a fixed wooden window. The window above it on the second floor is an eight-over-eight wooden sash window, like the others on the second floor. On the west bay, there is a four-over-four wooden sash window on the first floor and an 8-over-8 wooden sash window on the second floor.

The current owners have just completed a renovation of 3640 Piping Rock. There was no change to the existing façade. The Youngs made the following updates:

- updating of all bathrooms
- updating the kitchen
- adding on a new master bath and closet space above the existing den
- adding an en suite bathroom to the back bedroom

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## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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



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**EXHIBIT A**  
RAYMOND AND DAISY POWELL HOUSE  
3640 PIPING ROCK



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## EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP RAYMOND AND DAISY POWELL HOUSE 3640 PIPING ROCK NOT TO SCALE

