

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Wahlberg House  
**OWNERS:** Roger and Catherine Watkins  
**APPLICANTS:** Same  
**LOCATION:** 816 Arlington Street - Houston Heights Historic District South

**AGENDA ITEM:** IId  
**HPO FILE NO:** 11L246  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Apr-25-2011  
**HAHC HEARING:** Jul-14-2011

**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 16 and South ½ of Lot 17 (aka Tract 17A), Block 250, Houston Heights, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story, wood frame single-family residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Craftsman-style bungalow at 816 Arlington was built in 1922 by Phillip Wahlberg for his family. The Wahlberg House features a low-pitched, clipped gable roof with wide, unenclosed eave overhangs, a partial width porch with a roof supported by square wood columns and brick column bases, triangular knee braces; and attic windows in both front facing gables. The house was completely restored in 2008, including the construction of a compatible, one-story side addition. The house retains a very high level of architectural integrity and many original features, and was featured in the Winter 2010 issue of *American Bungalow* magazine.

The Wahlberg House is located within the boundary of the Houston Heights Historic District South. The Houston Heights neighborhood encompasses one of the first planned communities in Texas and has retained much of its architectural and civic identity. Houston Heights presents a Whitman's Sampler of turn-of-the-century architectural styles. Several notable late-Victorian era mansions and substantial early 20th-century public, ecclesiastical, fraternal and commercial buildings serve as the anchors of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the real strength of Houston Heights rests in its wide array of essentially vernacular, middle-class, and domestic architecture of the period 1893-1941, of which the Wahlberg House is an excellent example.

The Wahlberg House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 5 for Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Craftsman bungalow at 816 Arlington was built in the spring of 1922 by Phillip Wahlberg. Phillip L. Wahlberg and Ella Swanson were married December 1922. Phillip was a book keeper for a shipping company and Ella was a nurse. They moved into the house the same month.

Phillip Wahlberg's parents, Nels Otto Wahlberg and Augusta Larson, were born in Sweden in 1862 and 1866, respectively, and married in Illinois in 1886. They had seven children, some born in Texas and some in Illinois, suggesting that the family moved back and forth between the two states. Phillip was the eldest and was born in the early 1890s. The family appears to have been living in Houston Heights from the 1910 census, and Phillip and two siblings settled in Houston, living for

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sometime before he married at 820 Arlington with other family members. Ella's parents later lived at 811 Arlington Street.

Phillip and Ella Wahlberg had four children, Paul, Martha, Phillip and Marie, who were all raised in the house and attended local schools including Reagan High School. Phillip added another bedroom at the rear of the house to accommodate his growing family and for some time his mother-in-law also lived with them. He used the garage as an office and in summer the boys slept there on a porch. Phillip owned the house until his death in the 1970s. Paul, the eldest son, was an architect and died in May 2010. He was an honorary director of the Houston Golf Association and created an endowment at Texas A & M University. According to one of his sisters, his first architectural project was designing the building occupied by C and D Hardware on 11th Street. Martha now lives in North Carolina and Marie in Richardson, Texas.

## *Houston Heights*

Houston Heights, the largest, earliest planned community in Texas, was developed by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891. Oscar Martin Carter was President of the American Loan and Trust Company, which created the Omaha and South Texas Land Company for the purpose of developing their new site, Houston Heights in the early 1890s. O. M. Carter, born in Massachusetts in 1842, came to Houston from Nebraska in 1887 to scout out the new, emerging city and discovered that Houston was destined to soon become a great city. Carter had been involved in banking and real estate in Nebraska and Colorado, and his move to Texas followed the organization of the Omaha and South Texas Land Company.

In May 1891, Omaha and South Texas Land Company purchased 1,756 acres of land just northwest of Houston and made over \$500,000 worth of improvements before offering lots for sale in 1893. He chose this location, in part, because of the area's proximity to the Houston business center, and also because the elevation is higher "and healthier" (as promoted at the time due to frequent malaria outbreaks) than that of adjacent parts of Houston. In 1891 Carter and his partner Daniel Denton Cooley purchased, merged and electrified both mule-drawn streetcar systems in Houston and extended the lines to the new community. In 1892, they developed public utility systems, sidewalks, and streets, including Heights Boulevard with its grand, 60-foot wide esplanade and street car service; built and marketed 17 homes for sale as well as lots for home building by others; allocated sites for parks and schools; built the Houston Heights Hotel on West 19th Avenue to encourage the establishment of the business center served by streetcar; encouraged the establishment of churches; and facilitated the development of a major industrial, manufacturing district in the northwest section of Houston Heights, also served by railroads. Houston Heights grew rapidly and was incorporated as a city in 1896. It flourished as a distinct municipality until 1918 when the residents voted to be annexed to the City of Houston mainly to guarantee school funding.

Furthermore, in spite of tremendous pressure for development, the effects of several periods of decline, and a lack of zoning laws, the relationship of the buildings within Houston Heights has survived. A majority of the area still consists of tree lined streets of older residences, punctuated by occasional churches, schools and commercial buildings.

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The bungalow is by far the most prevalent architectural style in Houston Heights. In fact, between 1905 and 1925 the bungalow became one of the predominant house forms in Houston's suburban neighborhoods. The rise in popularity of this style in Houston reflected a nationwide movement which started in the western United States and moved to the east. The bungalow house type was a departure from the large dark, multi-roomed Victorian houses of the past. The plans utilized space very efficiently in an open and compact manner. The bungalow had a simple floor plan, with many windows for light, and a low roof and wide eave overhang for comfort. It was touted as "clean and sanitary" where the woman of the house did her own cleaning and housekeeping, whereas larger houses required domestic help to serve and clean all the rooms. The bungalow was one of the first small houses in America designed with the automobile in mind, as evidenced by the side-entrance porte-cochere. The bungalow could be easily adapted to meet the needs of various locales while preserving its distinctive stylistic features. The bungalow was a style particularly well suited for Houston because it fit neatly on the standard 50-foot by 100-foot lots found in many of the area's early 20<sup>th</sup> century subdivisions.

Craftsman houses were inspired primarily by the work of two California brothers – Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene – who practiced together in Pasadena around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several influences – the English Arts and Crafts movement, an interest in oriental wooden architecture, and their early training in the manual arts – appear to have led the Greenes to design and build these intricately detailed buildings. These and similar residences were given extensive publicity in such magazines as *Western Architect*, *The Architect*, *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Architectural Record*, *Country Life in America*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*, thus familiarizing the rest of the nation with the style. As a result, a flood of pattern books appeared, offering plans for Craftsman bungalows; some even offered completely pre-cut packages of lumber and detailing to be assembled by local labor. Through these vehicles, the one-story Craftsman house quickly became the most popular and fashionable smaller house in the country.

The Wahlberg House at 816 Arlington Street is an excellent example of the Craftsman bungalow style of architecture. The Craftsman architectural elements present on the house include a low-pitched, clipped gable roof with wide, unenclosed eave overhang; partial width porch with roof supported by square wood columns with battered sides, and brick column bases; triangular knee braces; and attic windows in both front facing gables.

In 2008, the current owners received a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HAHC to restore and remodel the house. The work included a 551 square foot addition to the northeast rear corner of the existing historic house allowing for two new bedrooms and bathrooms; extending the kitchen; adding a screened rear porch; original wood 117 siding was repaired and refinished; original windows and screen were repaired and reinstalled; repaired and re-covered roof; repainted; repaired chimney brick; the interior was completely rewired, re-plumbed, re-finished, and repaired. After the restoration and remodel were complete, the house at 816 Arlington was featured in *American Bungalow Magazine*.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

City of Houston City Directories, various dates.

Harris County Deed Records, various dates.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee, Field Guide to American Houses, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984.

Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston.

*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.*

## APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, 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:

- | <b>S</b>                            | <b>NA</b>                           | <b>S - satisfies</b> | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> | <b>NA - not applicable</b> |
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- (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;
- (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.

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**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 Wahlberg House at 816 Arlington Street.

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**EXHIBIT A**  
**WAHLBERG HOUSE**  
**816 ARLINGTON STREET**



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## EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP WAHLBERG HOUSE 816 ARLINGTON STREET NOT TO SCALE

