

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Westwood-Milliken-Frucht House

**AGENDA ITEM:** II.c

**OWNER:** Robert J. Conwell

**HPO FILE NO:** 11L251

**APPLICANT:** Same as owner

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jul-13-2011

**LOCATION:** 3120 South MacGregor Way – Riverside Terrace

**HAHC HEARING:** Aug-17-2011

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 4 and Tract 3A Block 44, Riverside Terrace, Section 8, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick veneer single-family residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Westwood-Milliken-Frucht House at 3120 South MacGregor Way was designed and constructed in 1931-32 by Hayes & Orem. Hayes & Orem, a partnership of LeRoy Hayes and Herbert Orem, designed and constructed homes in the late 1920s and early 1930s in River Oaks, Boulevard Oaks and Riverside Terrace. The house at 3120 South MacGregor Way was designed in an English Picturesque style and was first occupied by H.O. Westwood, an executive in the canning industry. Later residents included prominent Houstonians Dr. Gibbs Milliken, who owned the house from 1936-1945, and Sig Frucht, who was in the produce business and owned the house from 1949 to 1967.

First platted in 1924, the affluent neighborhood of Riverside Terrace in southeast Houston became known as the 'Jewish River Oaks' from the 1930s through the 1950s. Architects who designed houses in the neighborhood included John Chase, John Staub, Birdsall P. Briscoe, Bolton & Barnstone, Joseph Finger, Bailey A. Swenson, and MacKie and Kamrath. Beginning in the 1950s, the neighborhood transitioned to primarily African-American families. The 1985 documentary "This Is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale" by Jon Schwartz gives a 60-year overview of the community and its struggle to integrate. Today, the neighborhood contains numerous examples of outstanding architecture from the late Art Deco and mid-century modern eras, interspersed with small motels and apartments.

The Westwood-Milliken-Frucht House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *Hayes & Orem*

The Westwood-Milliken-Frucht House at 3120 South MacGregor Way was designed and built by Hayes & Orem, a partnership of LeRoy Hayes and Herbert Orem, who designed and built houses in the late 1920s and early 1930s in several affluent Houston neighborhoods.

LeRoy Hayes was born in 1896. Hayes worked in 1922 as a clerk for the Fidelity Trust Co., a real estate company. In 1924, Hayes was working for the Varner Realty Company, which was then selling homesites in Norhill. LeRoy Hayes died in March 1981 in Houston.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

Herbert Orem was born in Missouri in 1879 and came to Houston by 1902, where he is listed in the City Directory as a typesetter for Miller & Orem. Orem died in 1937 and is buried in Hollywood Cemetery.

Work by Hayes & Orem is listed in the Texas General Contractors Association Journal in 1928. An office address is not listed in the city directories of these years. However, by 1934, they are no longer working together. In 1934, Leroy Hayes worked as a clerk at the Federal land Bank. Herbert Orem was back at his previous job as the Secretary of the Houston-Galveston Typothetae (typesetting) and later worked as the Executive Secretary at the Texas Graphic Arts Zone Federation until his death.

Hayes & Orem designed and constructed the following buildings in Houston:

### Residential:

- 2512 Prospect, Riverside Terrace (1928) – for a client
- 1716 North Blvd., Boulevard Oaks Historic District (1929) – for a client
- 1728 North Blvd., Boulevard Oaks Historic District (1929) – for a client
- 2310 Arbor (apartments), Riverside Terrace (1929) – for a client
- 2505 Pelham Road, River Oaks (1929) – speculative house
- \*1525 Lombardy, Broadmoor (1929) – speculative house
- 1720 North Blvd., Boulevard Oaks Historic District (1930) – speculative house
- \*3227 Avalon, River Oaks (1930) – Speculative house
- 2515 Riverside Drive, Riverside Terrace (1930) – Speculative house

### Non-residential:

- 4336 Bell Street, Eastwood (Duplex), 1928 – speculative property  
*\*Demolished*

Homes listed under L.R. Hayes only, for the years 1932-1933:

- 3439 Wichita Street, Southwood (1932) – for a client
- 3334 S. MacGregor Drive, Riverside Terrace (1933) - for the MacGregor Drive Realty Co. This house is very similar to 3120 S. MacGregor Drive.
- 2250 Albans Road, Southampton (1933) - for a client

Following the dissolution of Hayes & Orem, LeRoy Hayes partnered with Roger N. Hancock to form Hancock & Hayes. Roger N. Hancock had also been building during this period. They kept offices in the Sterling Building. Hancock & Hayes went on to build numerous homes in the mid-1930s, including 108 Avenue B in Garden Villas, which was chosen as the July Home of the Month for McCall's Magazine in 1937. However, by the mid-1940s their partnership has also dissolved. Hayes continued work as an architect and contractor, while Hancock entered the lumber and labor business. Roger Hancock was born in 1890 and died in 1978.

### *H.O. Westwood*

Although the home was built in 1931-32, the first occupant of the home, H.O. Westwood, does not appear at the address until the City Directories in 1934. H.O. Westwood was the Vice President and General Manager of the Southwestern Can Company. He and his wife Grace, and their three children Robert, Helen and Margaret lived in the house until 1936.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Archaeological & Historical Commission**

**Planning and Development Department**

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## *Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs Millikin*

In 1936, Dr. Gibbs and Harriet Milliken moved into the house. The Millikens had three children - Harriet, Alice and Gibbs. Dr. Milliken was born in New York City, New York, in 1895, the son of Samuel E. and Sallie Gibbs Milliken. Dr. Milliken came to Houston in 1925 after working as a professor of pathology at UTMB in Galveston, Texas. His professional education was attained in Edinburgh, Scotland, and at UTMB. Dr. Milliken was a member of Phi Gamma Delta and Phi Chi medical fraternity. He also served in the 166th Infantry in France during World War II. He had several papers published during his career. His son, Gibbs Milliken, was a professor at the University of Texas.

Dr. Gibbs Milliken died at the age of 49 on March 23, 1945, in his home. He was buried in the Forest Park Lawndale Cemetery. Harriett Bain Millikin died in San Antonio on March 15, 1974. She was also buried at Forest Park Lawndale.

## *Sigmund (Sig) Frucht*

The next owners of the house, Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund (Sig) Frucht, moved in to the house in 1949. Frucht was the son of Austrian immigrants who moved from Galveston to Houston in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He graduated from Sam Houston High School. Frucht was in the produce business at the Sig Frucht Company, located on Commerce Avenue. His brothers were also in the produce business. Frucht's personal history, the Sig Fruch Collection, is part of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. The Collection contains a short biographical sketch of Frucht, included here:

“Sig Frucht, born in 1899 in Galveston, Texas emerged from humble beginnings to become one of Houston's most successful and beloved businessmen by the 1940s. Mr. Frucht was best known for his devotion to his business, Sig Frucht Produce, his family and the sports team he sponsored; the Sig Frucht Ramblers. Little is known about Mr. Frucht's early years however it is clear that he maintained a close relationship throughout his life with the Boy's Town orphanage for boys in Nebraska. He was made an Honorary Citizen of Boy's Town and corresponded with Father Flanagan for many years.

He enlisted in the U. S. Army at the age of 19 and worked in the produce distribution warehouse where he was stationed in Australia. His army Sergeant reported that Lt. Frucht usually worked 16 hour days without complaint. Shortly after his honorable discharge in 1918 he began Sig Frucht Produce, Inc. in the old Houston produce market downtown on Commerce Street. He soon earned the moniker “The Grapefruit Kid” because of his tenacity in promoting the retail purchase of Ruby Red® grapefruit grown in Texas' Rio Grande Valley instead of imported grapefruit. He was the pioneer in promoting the Ruby Red® that we find so frequently abundant today. He steadily worked until Sig Frucht Produce became known worldwide to grocers as a supplier of quality avocados, vegetables, bananas, grapefruit and citrus, and other fruit thought to be exotic at that time such as mango and papaya. In households Sig Frucht Produce was known for their delightful mail order gift baskets. When the new Houston Produce Terminal was built Sig Frucht was elected President and remained in that post for five annual terms. Sig Frucht Produce, Inc. remained in business for 50

# CITY OF HOUSTON

years. During that time Mr. Frucht started his day at 3: 00 or 4:00 a.m. He spoke of the romance and adventure of being in the produce industry. Indeed, his occupation took him to foreign countries. The most notable of these was Havana, Cuba where Mr. Frucht developed many close business relationships and friendships. After retirement he continued to maintain his office and mail order catalog at the Houston Produce Terminal. He continued to foster solid relationships with local grocers such as the Weingarten family and others close to the produce industry.

Despite heading a time-consuming business, Mr. Frucht found time to contribute to the community by sponsoring the Ramblers Club sports team. The Ramblers Club was founded by a group of young Jewish men that competed with other teams in a number of different sports. This was a very important way to occupy the time and nurture the talents of these young men during the depression when work was difficult to find and time was abundant. All of the Ramblers went on to become respectable and productive citizens in adulthood. Other ways Mr. Frucht was an influence in the community include becoming an honorary sheriff's deputy in service of his close friend, Sheriff, Buster Kern and serving as a Harris County Grand Juror for three terms.

Sig Frucht made and kept friends throughout his life. He had a risqué and mischievous sense of humor as evidenced by the memorabilia with which he chose to decorate his scrapbooks. This was tempered by a truly caring, kind and generous humanitarian who valued his relationships and work above all else."

The late Houston restaurateur and philanthropist Felix Tijerina worked for Sig Fucht's produce company in the 1920s. They became lifelong friends, according to a biography of Tijerina.

Subsequent owners of 3120 S. MacGregor Way include Mr. and Mrs. Edward Moore (1967-2007), and current owner Robert Conwell. Conwell purchased the home in 2007, and has restored the house. It is exceptionally maintained.

## *Riverside Terrace*

The first section of Riverside Terrace was platted in 1924. Development of the area was started by Henry Frederick MacGregor, who came to Houston in 1883 and began investing in real estate. By 1900, MacGregor was instrumental in extending Houston's residential area southward by building several subdivisions in the South Main area.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, "street-car suburbs," flourished in Houston and residential developments spurred extension of streetcar lines. But by the mid-1920s, the growing popularity of the automobile led to new "automobile suburbs" in Houston. Several of these were laid out on either side of Brays Bayou in the vicinity of Hermann Park. One such suburbs is Riverside Terrace.

When Riverside Terrace opened, early sales brochures stressed the premier location of this subdivision as being near the South Main cultural, medical, educational, and social facilities. The first section of the project – an area bounded by Almeda, Blodgett, Live Oak, and Oakdale – was financed by the Guardian Trust Company. The developer, using the same sales rhetoric as the River Oaks Corporation, noted that there would be "rigid building restrictions...so that each

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

purchaser is assured beforehand of the exact character of the improvements with which he will be surrounded.” The successful venture attracted other developers, and the suburbs of Washington Terrace and Riverside were platted. Today, the entire area is known as Riverside Terrace.

The area was once home to a large number of Jewish families such as the Weingartens, the Fingers, the Sakowitz, and the Battlesteins, who were excluded from River Oaks. From the 1930s until the post-war era, the neighborhood became known as the ‘Jewish River Oaks,’ and was just as affluent and swanky.

The demographics began to change drastically in the 1950s when the first African-American family moved into the neighborhood. In 1952, a wealthy African-American cattleman named Jack Caesar moved his family into the neighborhood. He stayed despite a bomb being detonated on his front porch. In the middle 1950s, the white and Jewish families began moving out to the suburbs. In the early 1960s, white residents who saw potential for an integrated neighborhood tried to stabilize it by posting signs that read: "This Is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale," which is also the title of a 1985 documentary by Jon Schwartz that gives a 60-year overview of the community and its struggle to integrate. Eventually all but a few whites and Jews succumbed to pressures by their neighbors' departure and left Riverside Terrace entirely.

It wasn't long before Riverside Terrace was once again home to prominent, wealthy families – this time African-American. College professors, doctors, lawyers and politicians moved into the large homes and mansions.

Architects who designed some of the first homes in the neighborhood included John Chase, John Staub, Birdsall Briscoe, Bolton & Barnstone, and Joseph Finger. Several distinctive modern houses were designed by the office of Bailey A. Swenson. The architectural firm of MacKie and Kamrath also produced structures of modern design. One home, published in Architectural Record in 1942, was described as having excited neighborhood controversy for being so modern. Today, the neighborhood contains numerous examples of outstanding architecture from the late Art Deco and mid-century modern eras, interspersed with small motels and apartments.

Home construction and commercial development have recently revived, especially on the southern edge of the area. The homes in Riverside Terrace are as diverse as the characters that shaped its history. Houses range from 2,000 to 6,000 square feet. Lots can be as large as two acres. Prices range from \$30,000 to \$1 million.

While many changes have occurred over the years, Riverside Terrace continues to be home to many Houstonians who enjoy being a short distance from downtown, the Museum District, and the Medical Center.

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

The Westwood-Milliken-Frucht House at 3120 South MacGregor Way was built in 1931-32 and covers 4,191 square feet on a 18,094 square foot lot. It faces north with a view of the bayou, and was originally on three lots. The two lots on either side of the house were sold and contain newer mid-century homes.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

The house is designed in an English Picturesque style. The main block of the house is under a side gabled roof with a varied roof height. It has a multi gabled front façade. The house is faced with red and black brick, with some decorative stone detailing.

The house can be divided into four parts on the front façade. To the far east is a one-story later addition (pre-1950), constructed of brick. It features a bay window with fixed paned lights and stucco detailing.

To the west in the main historic house is a bank of four 1-over-1 windows with 2-light transoms above, topped with a stone lintel. Above on the second story is a bank of three 1-over-1 wood sash windows and one 1-over-1 sash window.

The entrance bay projects slightly from the main block and is faced in stone. It features a wood paneled front door recessed under arches of brickwork and an arch of stone. Above the entry on the second story is a diagonally paned wood sash window with shutters. It is capped with a front facing gable.

The west bay project forward from the entrance bay and is faced with brick. The first story facade features a large bay window of five fixed windows with 2-over-4 panes. It is capped with a metal roof. On the second story façade is a bank of three 1-over-1 wood sash windows capped with a stone lintel. An attic vent punctuates the front gable in the attic story. There is decorative stone work at the ends of the front gabled roof.

The house has been well maintained over the years and is in excellent condition. The upstairs bathrooms of the house have never been renovated. All of them are completely intact and representative of period bathroom interiors.

### **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.*



# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## EXHIBIT A

WESTWOOD-MILLIKEN-FRUCHT HOUSE  
3120 SOUTH MACGREGOR WAY





# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

**EXHIBIT B**  
**SITE LOCATION MAP**  
**WESTWOOD-MILLIKEN-FRUCHT HOUSE**  
**3120 SOUTH MACGREGOR WAY**  
**NOT TO SCALE**

