

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: William D. Royston House
OWNERS: Elizabeth and James W. Whitehead, III
APPLICANTS: Elizabeth and James W. Whitehead, III
LOCATION: 2224 Looscan Lane – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: II.f
HPO FILE NO: 11L254
DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-29-2011
HAHC HEARING: Aug-17-2011

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 13, Block 48, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is two-story brick and stucco veneer residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The residence at 2224 Looscan Drive, designed by well-known architect Charles Oliver, was built in 1927-28. The home was built for William Davis Royston, Certified Public Accountant, who had his own business, William D. Royston, CPA, Co., in the First National Bank Building. The William D. Royston House was designed in the “American” style and is unique in that it was the very first home built in Section 3 (the “Buffalo Drive Section”).

The William D. Royston House meets criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The first mention of the Royston home came on October 23, 1927 when a drawing of the home and the following appeared in the *Houston Chronicle*:

“Drawing of Royston Home – Artist’s drawing of J.D. Royston’s home now in the course of construction in River Oaks. This home, the first to be erected in the 3rd or Buffalo Drive section, was begun the day the last square yard of paving was laid. Architect Charles W. Oliver classified it as “American” in design.”

Upon completion in 1928, the following appeared in the *Houston Post-Dispatch* along with a large photograph of the home:

“The first home to be built in the Buffalo Drive section of River Oaks, that section most recently under development, was the residence of W.D. Royston family at 2242 (sic) Looscan Lane. Charles W. Oliver, AIA, architect for the River Oaks Corporation, who designed it classifies it as an “American” type house. It is planned along lines that are considered distinctly an American development in home architecture.

It embodies a happy combination of common brick and stucco, one of its most interesting features being a studio sleeping porch which takes the form of an old-style lean-to on the southeast side of the house.

Downstairs there is a living room, dining room, breakfast room and kitchen and the sleeping porch. Upstairs there are two bedrooms and a bath. The house is heated by a warm air heating plant.”

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William D. Royston (1888-1971) was a native of Bastrop who lived in Houston for approximately 59 years. He married Frances Lenore Taylor in 1925 in Houston. Royston was a Certified Public Accountant who had his own business, William D. Royston, CPA, Co. with offices in the First National Bank Building. The 1932 City Directory lists his firm as “Auditors, Income Tax Service.” His obituary of August 20, 1971 shows that he served in World War I and was a 50-year member of the Masonic Lodge.

William and Frances Royston lived in the house at 2224 Looscan Lane from the late 1920s until the mid 1950s, approximately 30 years. They sold the house to Dudley W. Denton, an accountant with Winkelman, David and Johnson, who lived in the home for the next 25 years. After this stable ownership, the home went through a series of owners, including Robert Lehman (1984), Joseph Archer (1986), Richard Calfee (1988), Nancy Taylor (1999), Jeroen Baaima (2002) and the current owners, Elizabeth and James Whitehead (2005).

The home was designed by noted Houston architect, Charles Oliver, who was the in-house architect for the River Oaks Corporation from 1926 to 1931. According to notes from Stephen Fox, Oliver was a native of Dallas and had previously worked in the architectural/construction firm of the Russell Brown Company, which constructed many stylish homes in Dallas and Houston during the first quarter of the 20th century. Oliver worked for the Russell Brown Company from 1916 until 1926, when he was hired away by the River Oaks Corporation. Eventually, Oliver would design 75 homes in the upscale River Oaks neighborhood in many styles including Georgian, Tudor, Dutch Colonial, Mediterranean and Norman. (Some of his most distinctive homes include the Mediterranean style homes, of which approximately six are still standing in River Oaks.) Some of Oliver’s houses include:

- 2203 Brentwood, 1925 (Mediterranean)
- 1903 Bellmeade, 1926 (Mediterranean)
- 2508 Pelham Drive, 1927 (Charles Oliver’s family home)
- 1528 Kirby Drive, 1927-28
- 1827 Kirby Drive, 1927-28
- 3394 Chevy Chase, c. 1928 (Georgian)
- 1925 Bellmeade, 1928 (Registered Landmark Home)
- 2007 River Oaks Boulevard, 1929 (home of Mike Hogg, developer of River Oaks)
- 3015 Del Monte, c. 1929 (Tudor)
- 2504 Pelham Drive, c. 1929 (Norman)
- 2141 Pine Valley, c. 1930 (Tudor)
- 3223 Chevy Chase, c. 1934 (Mediterranean)
- 3358 Inwood Drive, 1930 (Christie home)
- 1407 Kirby Drive, 1930 (Manorial)
- 2970 Lazy Lane, 1934 (as consulting architect to James C. Mackenzie with Birdsall Briscoe)

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The William D. Royston House sits in the center of its lot on Looscan Lane, facing south. The house is two-story; the first story is faced in red brick and the second story is stucco.

The house contains a front entrance in a one-story wing located to the west of the main two-story portion of the house. This entrance is recessed about three feet under the roof. The front door is a wood paneled door. There is an arched multi-light fanlight above and sidelights on either side of the door. This entrance is not original and has been changed.

The main two-story block of the house is anchored by a massive brick chimney that projects from the house in the center of this block. It rises high above the height of the house. To the west of the chimney on the first floor façade is a large multi-light bay window with metal roof. This bay window is a later addition, but the style is consistent with the wood-sash windows that were there before. Above the window on the second story façade are paired 6-over-6 windows. Directly west of the chimney on the second floor façade is an oval shaped 9-light window. To the east of the chimney and flush with the chimney on the first floor facade is a multi-light fixed window under a composite shingle roof. This window is also an alteration from the original window but it retains the style of the original. Above the window on the second story façade are paired 6-over-6 windows.

A slight alteration to the house has taken place at the front entrance. The original house had the same one-story entrance wing but it was recessed farther from the front lien of the house and contained a shed roof that shielded the front entry. There were separate paneled doors on the front and west façade of this entry. A slight shed canopy was over the west entry. A porch had a wooden balustrade. The original front entry was very awkward; it is not a surprise that it has been changed over time. The current entry door and lights are in keeping with the “American” design of the house.

An addition to the house is set back far from the front façade and is minimally visible from the right-of-way. The house is in excellent condition and has been well maintained.

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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

City Directories.

Fox, Stephen, ed., *Houston Architectural Guide*, 2nd edition, American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, 1999.

Fox, Stephen, personal notes on Charles Oliver, May 3, 2005.

Houston Chronicle, Preliminary Drawing of home, October 23, 1927.

Houston Post-Dispatch, “Royston home in River Oaks,” April 1, 1928.

Houston Chronicle, “Obituary of William Royston,” August 20, 1971.

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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:

- | S | NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
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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 William D. Royston House at 2224 Looscan Lane.

EXHIBIT A

WILLIAM D. ROYSTON HOUSE
2224 LOOSCAN LANE



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Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
WILLIAM D. ROYSTON HOUSE
2224 LOOSCAN LANE
NOT TO SCALE

