

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Gregory School

**OWNER:** City of Houston

**APPLICANT:** City of Houston, Houston Public Library; Building Services Dept.

**LOCATION:** 1300 Victor Street – Freedmen’s Town Historic District

**HEARING NOTICE:** Jun-03-03

**AGENDA ITEM:** Vb

**P.C.MEETING DATE:** Jun-26-03

**HPO FILE NO.:** 03L109

**DATE ACCEPTED:** May-03-03

**HAHC HEARING DATE:**06-19-03

### SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1-8, Block 61 and Lots 1-10, Block 66, W. R. Baker Addition, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The historic building on the site is the two-story, brick veneer school building facing Victor Street.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Freedmen’s Town Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 17, 1985 which included Gregory School as a “contributing” building to the historic district. The National Register application gives the address as 1315 Cleveland Street (there are two separate rear doors of the building facing Cleveland where Matthews Street ends on the North side at the school site. Gregory School was designated as a State Archaeological Landmark (SAL) on March 17, 1995 (shown as 1400 Wilson) under the following criteria: A) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; C) Is important to a particular cultural or ethnic group; D) Is the work of a significant architect, master builder, or craftsman; and F) Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to the understanding of Texas culture or history.

The building, a two-story reinforced concrete frame, H-shaped plan, consists of 20 classrooms which open off lateral cross halls. The school building was constructed by the Houston Independent School District (HISD) in 1926 as an elementary school for Black children in the Fourth Ward. Prior to 1923 Houston Schools had been conducted as a department of the City of Houston. HISD had been created by a special act of the Texas State Legislature on March 20, 1923. In a second Bond election in February, 1926 voters approved \$4 million (first one being approved December, 1924 for \$3 million) which included the erection of eight new elementary schools, including Gregory. The contractor for Gregory School was William E. Woodruff and the cost of construction was \$83,285. He was also contractor for Douglass School on Paige Street (Third Ward) (demolished) the same year. The original address of Gregory School in the 1926 City Directory was listed as “Cleveland southeast [should be southwest] corner of Wilson,” and the first principal was William E. Miller. Gregory School was named in honor of the former Gregory Institute that was the namesake of General Edgar M. Gregory, the first assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Texas and who donated the land for the Institute. The Gregory Institute was a high school for Black children in Houston, located on Jefferson Avenue between Smith and Louisiana Streets.

There are two original, separate entry doors for Gregory School which faces Victor Street. The one closest to the southwest corner of Wilson is known as 1300 Victor Street. The other door is mid-block and almost faces Matthews Street where it ends on the South side at the school site. To the left of this door was placed the original cornerstone that shows “Erected 1926.” The school building, which was built with Classical Revival influences (including parapets over entry doors at each end of the building), features two cast reliefs of the wise

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old “owl” which were placed above each large window over each entry door on Victor. In the 1929 City Directory the school address is given as 1400 Wilson Street. In the 1937 City Directory the address is shown as 1300 Victor. Gregory School was designed by Hedrick and Gottlieb, a prestigious architectural firm. They not only designed other historically and architecturally significant Houston buildings, including schools, but also designed numerous other important buildings throughout Texas.

At the March 13, 1997 public hearing of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), the HAHC discussed the expiration of the two-year temporary designation of all Landmarks and Historic Districts that City Council had previously designated when the Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted on March 1, 1995. Since the designation had expired, the HAHC requested that the planning staff contact the owners of these landmarks to determine their interest in the HAHC initiating an application for permanent designation. The Building Services Department, City of Houston in discussion with the Planning Department initiated Landmark designation of the Gregory School. The HAHC instructed the planning staff previously that if any landmark had been designated either by the National Register program (N.R.), as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL), a State Archaeological Site (SAL), or a temporary landmark of the City of Houston, then the application would be considered for permanent landmark designation on that merit alone because all of the required information has been filed to obtain status. Therefore, regarding the preparation of the application, HAHC agreed to consider the application based on those previous designations.

### **RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:**

The building has been vacant for a number of years and the condition is poor. The roof has large sized holes in it that have allowed rain to severely damage the roof truss system, wood floors (some of which can be retained and restored) and floor joists. The exterior brick also exhibits some cracking and displacement thus requiring some brick to be removed and replaced using original brick where possible. Most of the windows are damaged and will be restored or replicated. Lintels over the windows are severely rusted. Many of the original doors are missing or damaged. The building will require asbestos, lead paint and mold remediation. Over the years, other buildings were constructed on the site. In the 1945 City Directory, the address of Gregory School was shown as 1400 Wilson with a School annex at 1515 Wilson. The annex was apparently replaced with a more “modern” building by 1956 where the City Directory showed Gregory School at 1500 Wilson and an annex again at 1515 Wilson (southwest corner of Block 66). Another similar building to the annex was constructed at the corner of Cleveland and Cushing (north half of Block 61) both of which are non-contributing and not compatible to the historic Gregory School. Neither non-contributing building is attached to the historic Gregory School but only connected by metal breezeway awnings.

City Council authorized an interlocal agreement with Houston Independent School District conveying the Gregory School site at 1300 Victor Street to the City of Houston by Ordinance #00362 on May 10, 2000. There have been several public meetings to get public input on plans for the site. The Texas Historical Commission will be reviewing the project under the provisions of the Texas Antiquities Code since the site was designated as a State Archaeological Landmark (SAL).

### **SOURCES**

*Gregory School*, State Archaeological Landmark Designation Application, Mrs. Mary Bingham Anderson, nominator, February 26, 1994

*Handbook of Texas*, “Gregory Institute,” by Merline Pitre (Internet)

*Houston City Directory*, 1926, 1928, 1929-30, 1930-31, 1937-38, 1943-44, 1945, 1956

*Municipal Book City of Houston* (Period Ending December 31, 1928), City of Houston, Texas

*Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletin*, September, 1926

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Young, William A. Jr., *History of the Houston Public Schools 1836-1965*, Gulf School Research Development Association, Inc., 3801 Cullen Boulevard, Houston, Texas, 1968

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION...:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, 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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### STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to City Council the Landmark designation of the Gregory School at 1300 Victor Street.

SITE LOCATION MAP  
GREGORY SCHOOL  
1300 VICTOR STREET  
NOT TO SCALE