

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Roy and Margaret Farrar House

Owner: David Matthiesen

APPLICANT: Anna Mod, Preservation Consultant

LOCATION: 511 Lovett Boulevard

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: SEPT-23-2003

AGENDA ITEM: I

P.C. MEETING DATE: OCT-30-2003

HPO FILE NO.: 03L111

DATE ACCEPTED: SEPT-20-2003

HAHC HEARING: OCT-23-2003

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 4 and Tract 3, Block 10, Montrose Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a 2-story, masonry brick residential building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Roy Montgomery Farrar, who had 511 Lovett Boulevard constructed in 1923, was a leading Houston businessman and civic leader. The home, designed by Einar Stubee, a Norwegian-born architect, is a significant example of the type and style of mansions originally built on Lovett Boulevard in the very fashionable Montrose subdivision, which at that time, was by far the largest and grandest subdivision in Houston.

The house at 511 Lovett Boulevard, designed in 1923 by architect, Einar Stubee, was built for Roy and Margaret Farrar (Coover p. 16). Stubee, a Norwegian-American, was born circa 1900. He also designed the Blake House at No. 7 West Eleventh Place, a five-bay, Italianate style villa that is a contributing member of the locally designated West Eleventh Place historic district.

Roy Montgomery Farrar (1870-1943), the son of John H. and Sarah (Rose) Farrar, was born on December 16, 1870 in St. Louis, Missouri. He moved to Houston in 1885 and returned to Houston again in 1896 after spending 8 years in Dallas. He was a civic leader and as a businessman was involved in the lumber and banking industries ("FARRAR, ROY MONTGOMERY." The Handbook of Texas Online). He and his wife Margaret Campbell had three children.

The lumber trade was Farrar's primary business. In 1902 he became Jesse H. Jones' partner in the South Texas Lumber Company. In 1912 he started the Farrar Lumber Company that sold lumber at retail throughout the state. The first location of the company office and yards was at 501 Dowling, corner of Prairie. Farrar continued as president of his lumber company until his death in 1943 (Buenger, Walter, p. 99). The company continued after his death and was continuously listed in city directories through 1956 (end dates researched). Officers of the Farrar Lumber Company, Inc. in 1926 included Roy M. Farrar, president; Frank W. Murphy, vice-president; Claude T. Fuqua, secretary and manager. City directories from this year state the business sold "white pine, oak and poplar lumber, shingles, sash, doors, sand, gravel, lime and cement." The office and yards were located at 2401 Texas at the corner of Dowling. By 1936 the Farrar Lumber Company had added "creo-dip" stained shingles, brick, insulite, balsam-wood, sewer pipe, flue lining, cedar posts and builders hardware, paints and oils.

In addition to the lumber industry, Farrar was also an accomplished banker and got his start again with Jesse H. Jones' encouragement. In 1914 he became president of the National Bank of Commerce, precursor to Texas Commerce Bank. He served in that position until 1921. The Houston City Directory from 1915 lists Roy M. Farrar as president of the National Bank of Commerce, Edgewood Realty Company, Farrar Lumber Company, and the Southern Loan and Investment Company. He was second vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce for this same year and secretary-treasurer of the Majestic Realty Company. His residence is listed at 3102 Smith.

He also served as president of Union National Bank, another Jones associated bank, from 1924 until his death in 1943. He was involved in other Houston civic organizations including the Port Commission, Houston Chamber of Commerce and the Houston Housing Authority.

Opening day of the new Montrose subdivision was on October 1, 1911. Two years prior, John Wiley Link, a lawyer, lumberman and real estate developer and former Mayor of Orange, Texas, purchased 260 acres of the Obedience Smith land grant from over 20 different owners. Mr. Link and his associates created the Houston Land Corporation and then platted the property between Richmond, Pacific, Taft, and Graustark streets. Their development was named "Montrose" after the Royal Borough of Montrose, Scotland and at that time was by far the largest and grandest subdivision in the city. (Coover, pages 1-2). The subdivision was a marvel of its time and the Houston Land Company completed amenities such as landscaping, streets and curbs prior to the grand opening and the sale of the first lot for development.

In order to attract people to the new development, John Link built the first mansion at the southwest corner of Alabama and Montrose. Known as the Link-Lee mansion, the house is now the administration building of the University of St. Thomas and listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance and its relation to the development of Montrose. It has also been designated as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

The house at 511 Lovett is located on one of the four major esplanaded boulevards in the subdivision. In addition to Lovett Boulevard, Montrose, Yoakum and Audubon were all designed for larger and more prominent houses. (Coover, pages 1-2).

Landscape architect for the Montrose subdivision was Edward Teas of Teas Nursery and historical documents note that seven trainloads of palm trees for the boulevards as well as thousands of evergreens, camphor and shade trees were installed. (Coover, page 2)

The house appears on the 1924 Sanborn map as a two-story, frame dwelling with brick veneer and a tile roof. There is a large open, full-width front porch and a two-story wing on the west side that is noted as "open 1st" – this is the porte cochere. In the rear southwest corner of the house is a two-story room with an open porch on the second floor. Adjacent and to the east is a one-story room. There is a two-story, frame with brick veneer "auto garage" with a tile roof near the southwest corner of the property. The map also notes windows openings on both the first and second stories of the house and garage.

The 1924, with corrections in 1934 and 1951, Sanborn map, shows the same configuration of the house – the only change is it is now listed as a "frat house."

Deed record research shows the Greater Houston Improvement Company deeded the house via general warranty deed to Roy M. Farrar in 1923. The Farrar's owned the house until December of

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1944 when it was deeded by the Union National Bank of Houston, Independent Executor and Trustee of the Estate of Roy Montgomery Farrar, deceased, and Margaret Campbell Farrar, widow, to XI Phi Chi Benefit Association, Inc., a non-profit corporation. Phi Chi was the medical fraternity that owned the house until the late 1960s. Phi Chi deeded the property to Joe Dudley Pace in 1968. Through a judgment against Pace in Bexar County, the property then was deeded to John J. McEwen, Independent Executor of the estate of Bessie McEwen Spence who then sold it to J. H. Jones, Trustee a month later in August 1982. In November of 1982 J. H. Jones, Trustee sold the property to 511 Lovett Blvd. Venture, a Texas partnership composed of Melissa Jones Stevens, John Clinton Jones and Jess Holman Jones, II. This venture partnership sold the property to Evergreen Media of Houston, LP in June of 1993. This is the company that operates the radio station across the street, KTRH and KLOL. In addition to Farrar's association with Jesse H. Jones, the house has also had a close association with Jones and his heirs through ownership.

The house at 511 Lovett is a large symmetrical, five bay, two-story, wood-framed, brick veneered Prairie style house with Arts and Crafts detailing. The house is a central-bay-with-wings form with a tile terra cotta hipped roof and a recessed front entry. Flanking the central entrance are two-story hipped-roofed bays that project several feet from the building plane of the entry, a wooden, single light door with sidelights. The first floor of these bays has a low-pitched, hipped roof that continuously covers the porch. The house has hipped-roofed wings: the western wing has a porte cochere.

Arts and Crafts elements of the house include the large eave brackets and the decorative, triplet, multi-light windows on the second floor above the central entrance. Prairie style elements include the low-pitched rooflines that emphasize the horizontality of the house. On the second floor above the porch, are Chicago style windows, another Prairie style element. A Chicago style window is a sash window group with an A-B-A rhythm where the central window is larger than the two flanking it. All other windows on the house are uniform, 1/1 wooden sash and are paired, in triplets or in the rear, grouped in fours (a former second floor porch). There are also smaller 1/1 horizontal sash windows in the ground floor rear.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The front porch openings was enclosed only with plate glass in the late 20th century, and the entry door was moved forward at that time. This alteration was sensitively done and does not compromise the architectural integrity of the house. The two-story garage was demolished at an unknown date.

Researched by Anna Mod, Preservation Consultant

Additional Sources:

Coover, Gary. Lovett Boulevard / Avondale Addition. Script for Greater Houston Preservation Alliance Walking Tour, 1997.

Buenger, Walter L. and Joseph A. Pratt. But Also Good Business: Texas Commerce Banks and the Financing of Houston and Texas, 1886 – 1986. College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1986.

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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:

S NA

S - satisfies NA - not applicable

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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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to City Council landmark designation of the Roy and Margaret Farrar House.

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Site Location Map

Roy and Margaret Farrar House

511 Lovett Boulevard

Not to Scale