

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Houston Public Library – Heights Branch
OWNER: City of Houston, Texas
APPLICANT: City of Houston – Library Department
LOCATION: 1302 Heights Boulevard
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Sept-15-2004

AGENDA ITEM: III
HPO FILE NO.: 04L120
DATE ACCEPTED: Oct-20-2004
HAHC HEARING DATE: Nov-10-2004
PC MEETING DATE:

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 13, 14, 15 and 16, Block 170, Houston Heights Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a one-story public library building with stucco cladding with a one-story, modern addition on the north side.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Houston Public Library Heights Branch was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on May 14, 1984. The building is included within the boundaries of Houston Heights, which was designated as a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) by the National Register Program on June 22, 1983.

Constructed in 1925 from the design by James M. Glover, Houston architect, the Houston Public Library Heights Branch is constructed of hollow tile blocks with an exterior cladding of stucco and a pitched, terra-cotta tiled roof. The Italian Renaissance detail, executed in cast stone, marks the impressive, monument entrance bay. The entrance bay was constructed to project slightly forward of the tile-roofed library building. The graceful protruding entrance bay features large, round arched portals flanked by aedicular framed smaller windows over which are square, decorative panels with ocular windows. Pilasters with arabesque decorations rise to a heavy cornice over which is a niched parapet that emphasizes the entrance. Also notable are the three bays flanking on either side of the entrance bay and each of the side bays features fanlit casement windows with round arches. The building was officially dedicated on March 18, 1926.

Houston Heights was designated a MRA because it was at one time an independent municipality. Within its original boundaries are numerous buildings, many of which are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Houston Heights was developed by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891. It was incorporated later as a city in 1896 and, at that time, was the earliest and largest totally planned community in Texas. It flourished as a distinct municipality until the residents voted to be annexed by the City of Houston in 1918.

Today, the area still maintains the feeling of a distinctive, self-contained “small town” with its predominantly small 19th-century, one-story and two-story Victorian-era homes, and numerous early 20th-century bungalow style buildings. It also boasts a thriving business district on 19th Street (now predominantly antique shops and restaurants) and a large industrial district west of the business section. Also located in the neighborhood are a number of historic churches, theatres, corner stores, private and public parks, municipal facilities, schools and the City Hall and Fire Station building.

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As part of the celebration for the Centennial of Houston Heights, the Houston Heights Association sponsored many events throughout the year. The event for the actual day of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Houston Heights was held on May 5, 1991 when a Recorded Texas Historical Site marker for “Houston Heights” was dedicated. The application was researched and filed by Randy Pace, who had been the past Chairman of the Historical Committee and First Vice-President of the Houston Heights Association. The Houston Public Library Department, who also participated in the ceremony, was very receptive to having the marker placed on the grounds of the Heights Branch Library for the education of residents and visitors alike about the significance of Houston Heights.

Per the Houston Architectural Guide, Volume II (1980), James M. Glover was born in Illinois in 1880. After attending public school in Illinois, he later attended Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia where he received his architectural training. Before World War I he practiced architecture in Brownwood and Fort Worth, Texas and New Mexico. After serving in the Army Corps of Engineers, he came to Houston in 1920 and began his practice that included all types of work, but he concentrated on non-domestic architecture. Some of his known commissions include: J. S. Pyeatt House (1924) at 1309 North Boulevard, Houston, Texas (N. R., Broadacres Historic District – 1980); Burleson County Courthouse (1927) in Caldwell, Texas; and House at 2619 North Calumet (1930), in Riverside Park Addition, Houston, Texas (Stephen Fox, Houston Architectural Guide, 1990).

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 that City Council had previously designated when the Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted on March 1, 1995, one of which was Houston Public Library Heights Branch at 1302 Heights Boulevard. 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 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 with minimal information provided to them.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION

A one-story addition, consisting of an atrium and conference room, was added to the rear of the building in 1952. At that time, the interior arches were filled in, a large staircase was constructed in the rotunda entrance and fluorescent lights were installed throughout. In 1979 Ray B. Bailey Architects were commissioned to restore the historic building that brought back the building to its former elegance. Restoration on the building was completed in October 1979. Bailey was also hired to construct a large, L-shaped one-story addition to the north elevation of the original, historic building. Bailey’s solution was to do “a backdrop, a stage for the old building, that backs away, leaving the old building a presence in its full integrity.” (Houston Architectural Survey, 1980, Volume Two).

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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	D - does not satisfy	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

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the landmark designation of the Houston Public Library Heights Branch at 1302 Heights Boulevard.