

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**

**LANDMARK NAME:** Dr. Culver M. Griswold House

**OWNER:** Paul D. and Cathryn T. Chapman

**APPLICANT:** Same as Owner

**LOCATION:** 2121 Brentwood Drive – River Oaks

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** I. a

**HPO FILE NO:** 06L168

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Dec-8-2006

**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Dec-21-2006

**PC HEARING DATE:** Jan-4-2007

**SITE INFORMATION:**

Lot 8B and Tract 8C, Block 46, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic, two-story brick and shingle residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:**

The Griswold House, located at 2121 Brentwood, was built for Dr. Culver M. Griswold. The home was constructed in 1929 and designed by recognized Houston architect, Stayton Nunn. The body of work created by Nunn is substantial and includes the original River Oaks Community Center (River Oaks Shopping Center), parts of Methodist Hospital, and many public school buildings. The house has been featured in a Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) walking tour and in River Oaks Magazine. The house qualifies for landmark designation under criteria 3, 4, and 6.

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

Notable Houston architect Stayton Nunn designed the house at 2121 Brentwood Drive in 1929 for Dr. Culver McFerrin Griswold. Dr. Griswold (1894-1964) was born in Chillicothe, Texas. He practiced dermatology in Houston for approximately 30 years and was married to Florence Hamilton Griswold. The 1933 City Directory shows his practice as 'Diseases of the Skin and Radium Therapy' in the Medical Arts Building on Fannin. Radium therapy was a common medical practice during the 1920s until new studies in the 1960s shed doubt on the safety of such treatments and suggested a link between these types of treatment and the development of thyroid cancer. The therapy was used for such divergent ailments as curing ringworm of the scalp to alleviating swelling of the lymph nodes.

In the late 1950s, the Griswolds sold the home to Dr. and Mrs. Thomas D. Cronin. Dr. Cronin is probably best known as a co-inventor of the breast implant in 1962. According to the Houston Chronicle, Dr. Cronin was a "pioneer in the field of plastic surgery." He practiced for over 50 years, and was the author of over 100 articles on plastic surgery in medical books and journals. In recognition of his career, the Dr. Thomas D. Cronin Chair in Plastic Surgery was established in 1987 at the University of Texas Health Services Center. Dr. Cronin died in 1993, and the Chapman family purchased the home from the estate of Mrs. Cronin in 2001. Interestingly, the Griswolds' only child, Martha Griswold Stedman, was a playmate of the mother of the current owner. Paul Chapman's mother lived on Brentwood and played in the backyard of the Griswold home.

Stayton Nunn, the architect of the Griswold home, was born in Arkansas in 1899. He attended Trinity University in Waxahachie from 1916 to 1919. He earned degrees from Rice Institute in 1921 and 1922, and

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taught in the Rice architecture department from 1928 until 1941. Nunn practiced architecture in Houston for over 40 years.

From 1922 to 1928, Nunn worked as a draftsman for one of Houston's most prominent architects, William Ward Watkin (1886-1952). According to Stephen Fox, Watkin's "best buildings were designed during the later 1920's when Stayton Nunn was a member of his firm." In 1928, Nunn started his own practice. From 1936 to 1950, he was in partnership with Milton McGinty. It was during his partnership with McGinty that Nunn designed the iconic crescent-shaped River Oaks Community Center, whose continued existence is currently threatened. Later, he worked as the coordinating architect for the Houston Independent School District (1946-58). He finished his career at Nunn, Nunn & Ulbricht, a partnership with his son.

According to Stephen Fox, the homes and buildings completed by Stayton Nunn include the following:

- Cleveland Sewell House (National Historic Landmark), 3456 Inwood Drive – Cram & Ferguson with Stayton Nunn, 1926.
- 2235 Albans Road, House for Mrs. Stayton Nunn, 1928 (altered).
- 2011 University Boulevard, House for Southgate, Inc., 1930.
- 2012 Dryden, House for Southgate, Inc., 1930.
- 1927 Wroxton Road, Robert H. Williams House, 1930-31.
- 7185 Santa Fe Drive, Garden Villas Elementary School, 1931-32 (with Edward Wilkinson).
- 2121 Brentwood Drive, Dr. C. M. Griswold House, 1929.
- 2128 Brentwood Drive, Colonel Bates House, 1937 (information from RO Scrapbook).
- Houston Gardens, 100 houses for Houston Gardens, Inc., 1933-34.
- 1214 Berthea Avenue, H. Malcolm Lovett House, 1933-34; addition, 1951 (demolished 1998).
- Houston Gardens Elementary School, 1935 (demolished).
- 2426 Inwood Drive, Ben C. Duffie, Jr., House, 1935.

### Nunn & McGinty

- 100 Sandman Street, De Pelchin Faith Home, 1935-37, Architectural Record, August 1941.
- 7500 Kelving Drive, Glennlee, Glenn H. McCarthy House, 1935-37 (demolished).
- Five houses for John Embry, Idylwood, 1936.
- 2406 Wichita Avenue, Susie Louise Weathersby House, 1936.
- River Oaks Community Center, West Gray Avenue and South Shepherd Drive, 1936-37, with Oliver C. Winston (Architectural Record, June 1940).
- 109 N. Post Oak Lane, Dudley C. Sharp House, 1937-38 (demolished), (House & Garden May 1940).
- Remington Lane, Edward W. Kelley, Jr., House, 1938.
- 1508 Kirby Drive, E. A. Cox House, 1938.
- 3260 Truxillo Avenue, Cuney Homes, 1938-40, with John F. Staub, Architectural Forum, November 1940 (462-63).
- 1119 Grove Street, Kelley Courts, 1939-41.
- 4 South West Oaks, M. B. Richardson House, 1939-40 (demolished).
- The Golden Girl, 1927 West Gray Avenue, 1940 (demolished).
- 1221 S. Cage Boulevard, Pharr, TX, Leland McCullough House, 1940, William C. Baxter, associate architect.
- Jamail's Grocery, 75th and Lawndale, 1941-42.

Stayton Nunn

- Methodist Hospital, Bertner Avenue, 1951, with William Ward Watkin, Milton McGinty, and Vance D. Phenix.
- 5 Tiel Way, Forrest Lee Andrews House, 1952.
- Pearland High School, 1953, 1960.
- Spring Branch Junior High School, 1000 Piney Point Road, 1956, with C. A. Johnson.
- John L. McReynolds Junior High School, 5910 Market Street, 1956.

Nunn, Nunn & Ulbricht

- 210 Pine Hollow Lane, Col. William B. Bates House, 1959.
- 6333 South Braeswood Boulevard, Fondren Junior High School, 1959.
- R. H. Fonville Junior High School, 725 East Little York Road, 1958-60.

The home at 2121 Brentwood Drive was featured on a Houston AIA Tour where it was described as a “tribute to John Staub’s own house.” In the River Oaks Magazine piece on the house, attention is drawn to the effective “combination of brick and weathered silvery white shingles.” They describe the home as “a rambling version of Early American Architecture.” The home boasts an “interesting roof line with well designed dormers” that “give character to the garden façade.” The front of the home features a large sunny bay window on the eastern side.

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:**

The historic home located at 2121 Brentwood is in exceptional condition. The home has had only three owners, the Griswolds, Cronins, and Chapmans, since its construction in 1929. The Chapman family was initially drawn to the home because the original structure and character remained intact, and had not been “updated.”

The home was built in 1929 and added onto shortly thereafter with a wing on the east side. In 2001, the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems were updated. The Chapmans added a room to the south of the kitchen with architecture mirroring the existing sun room. Also, a playroom was added to the garage. In the garage addition, new French doors were custom-made to match the French doors on the south side of the living room. The additions are small and seamless.

The interior of the house remains faithful to its original intent with only minor modifications. The original gauze and wallpaper interior wall coverings have been covered with a thin layer of sheetrock to provide a smoother surface for painting. The very unusual interior doors and hardware are original to the home, with the exception of the French doors. The floors are random-width oak planks with beveled edges and pegs.

The front façade of the home remains true to its original design with the exception of a minor alteration which replaced some of the wood panels on the original front door with glass to allow in more light. Exterior shutters and shingle siding are original to the home as well. A custom gate was fabricated to match a missing original gate that had been removed from the home’s front western side. The grounds of the home are maintained as a formal, rear terraced garden. Although the owners are unsure of the landscape architect, it has been suggested that the landscape design was executed by C.C. (“Pat”) Fleming.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- Backgrounder Magazine; “Nasopharyngeal Radium Irradiation”, National Cancer Institute August 28, 1998.  
 Fox, Stephen, personal notes and research on Stayton Nunn, October, 2006.  
 Fox, Stephen, Houston Architectural Guide, American Institute of Architects, 1999.

- Houston Chronicle, "Stayton Nunn Service Set Today", December 27, 1985.
- Houston Chronicle, "Plastic Surgery Position Established", April 27, 1994.
- River Oaks Magazine, 1939.
- River Oaks: Three Self Guided Tours of its Architecture, Houston Chapter of AIA, Tour 1.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

**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                                  |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>S - satisfies    NA - not applicable</b> |                                     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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;                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>         | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (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;                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>         | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (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;  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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;   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>         | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.   |

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to the Houston City Council the Landmark Designation of the Dr. Culver M. Griswold House at 2121 Brentwood Drive.

SITE LOCATION MAP  
GRISWOLD HOUSE  
2121 BRENTWOOD  
NOT TO SCALE



