CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission **Planning and Development Department**

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Joseph and Mary Stevenson House
OWNERS: Daniel J. Piette and Doreen N. Stoller
APPLICANT: Same as Owners
LOCATION: 804 Harold Street, Houston, Texas
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

Agenda Item: V. a
HPO FILE NO.: 06PL31
DATE ACCEPTED: Oct-16-06
HAHC HEARING DATE: Nov-16-06
PC Hearing Date: Nov-30-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lot eleven (11) and the east twelve and one half (E. 12 ½') of lot ten (10), in Block twenty-three W (23-W) of Montrose Addition, an addition in Harris County, Texas, according to map or plat thereof recorded in Volume 5, Page 32, Map Records of Harris county, TX. The property is more commonly known per Harris county Appraisal District records as Lot 11 and Tract 10, Block W23, Montrose, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, stucco clad residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Joseph and Mary Stevenson House, located at 804 Harold Street, was constructed in 1915 as the family home of the Stevenson family. Joseph Stevenson was a founding partner in the Houston based firm of Stewart and Stevenson. The firm, which was founded in 1903 and offered services in carriage repairs and horse shoeing, now boasts 47 locations located worldwide and with annual revenues of approximately 750 million dollars. The home was designed by Mr. Stevenson and executed by prolific Houston builder and innovator E. L. Crain. Crain revolutionized the local home construction industry with his "Ready Cut" houses which furnished the architectural plans and materials already cut to size. Crain is also well known for his custom built homes, of which the Joseph and Mary Stevenson House is included. The house qualifies for landmark and protected landmark designation as an individually listed National Register property as well as under criteria 3, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

According to the National Register of Historic Places landmark nomination, which has been edited for length, "The Joseph R. and Mary M. Stevenson House, built in 1915, is a handsome example of the Craftsman style of the early 20th century American Movement in architecture. The two-story house with four square plan and one-story porch, has the low pitched roofs with wide eave overhangs, extended rafter ends and triangular knee brace supports favored by the movement. The major front gabled roof end and seven minor gables have exposed false wood cross timbers indicating a Tudor influence. Joseph R. and Mary M. Stevenson purchased lot 11 and part of lot 12 on the Northwest corner of Harold Street and Connor, now Stanford, in the Montrose addition of Houston, Harris County, Texas. This substantial property, built for the Stevenson's maturing family, was financed by Mary MacDonald Stevenson's inheritance, designed by her husband Joseph Rosenfeld Stevenson, and built by E.L. Crain, noted master builder and founder of Crain Ready Cut House Company."

"Montrose Addition, an area southwest of downtown Houston, was developed by John Wiley Link. The Houston Land Corporation, formed in 1910 by Link, acquired 165 acres of dairy farm land from the R.S. Sterling Company for $500,000. The land, two miles southwest of downtown, was part of a 3,370 acre grant deeded to Mrs. Obedience Smith by Anson Jones, the last president of The Republic of Texas, in Austin on February 3, 1845. A portion of the acquisition, Part 13 of the O. B. Smith Survey, formerly known as the Meyer

Cargill addition was recorded in Volume 203, page 507 of the Deed Records of Harris County, Texas, was approved as a residential development called Montrose, for sale to the public in 1911. The addition was named after a seaport town in Scotland immortalized in the writings of Sir Walter Scott. Four major boulevards, Lovett, Montrose, Audubon, and Yoakum, were laid out through the T-shaped tract. Annexation of Montrose Addition by The City of Houston occurred gradually between 1870 and 1913, with official platting occurring in 1915, the year the Stevenson's completed their house."

"Joseph R. Stevenson designed and installed the property's original landscaping. Recent palm trees on either side of the entry walk replace the original palms that died. Today vegetation typical of Houston, variegated privet, Indian Hawthorn, and azaleas surround the house. A large pecan tree grows in the center of the backyard."

"Montrose was a distinguished residential area until World War II. With little new construction occurring, homes began to be used for commercial activities. This change in deed restrictions caused Montrose, once one of Houston's most prestigious neighborhoods, to decline during the 1950's and 1960's. Today the neighborhood is transitional with scattered rehabilitation and new townhouse construction. Although many homes have been demolished, many remain, and the rehabilitation is leading to a new revitalization of the inner city neighborhood."

"The Joseph and Mary Stevenson house at 804 Harold Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas is an excellent example of Craftsman influenced architecture. Named for Mary McDonald Stevenson and Joseph Rosenfield Stevenson, founder of the Fortune 500 company, Stewart and Stevenson. The Stevenson house was built in 1915 in the Montrose addition of Houston by noted builder E. L. Crain, president of the Crain Ready-Cut Houses Company. The Stevenson's lived in the house during the early years of their marriage and family life, which was also the formative period for Stewart and Stevenson. After World War II, they sold this home and moved to the River Oaks area of Houston."

"Joseph 'Joe' Rosenfield Stevenson was one of four children born to John and Rebecca Stevenson. Stevenson's father, John Wister Stevenson was a railroad engineer and a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who stopped in Houston on his way to the California 'gold rush'. He met Rebecca Rosenfield, soon married, and remained in Texas the rest of his life. Rebecca's parents, who emigrated from Vienna, Austria to Houston in the 1800's, provided all six of their daughters with an education at Mrs. Brown's Private School."

"After Joseph's birth in Houston on August 14, 1880, the family moved to the railroad round house in Yoakum, Texas, later returning to Houston, where he graduated from Central High school. Always interested in design, Joseph wished to be an architect. When he was unable to continue with his education, he chose to apprentice with Mossert Keller, a carriage maker. According to his daughter, Matlin Stevenson, "he could do anything with his hands" and he "matched color exactly".

"On November 3rd, 1902, Joseph married another Houstonian, his neighbor, Mary Emma McDonald, born October 4, 1880. Mary's mother was born in Galveston and her family, the Knights, owned Galveston's first opera house. Mary's father, also a railroad engineer had emigrated from Ireland. A year after the Stevenson's marriage, Joseph R. Stevenson entered into a formal partnership agreement with C. Jim Stewart on April 4, 1903, founding Stewart and Stevenson, a general blacksmith and carriage shop. This was the inception of a business which was to grow and diversify over the century to become one of the largest design, manufacturing and distribution companies in the world."

"Joseph R. and Mary M. Stevenson had two children, Marguerite 'Madlin', born September 28, 1904, and Joseph Donald, born July 2, 1910. Joseph R. and Mary M lived with the McDonalds on Nance Street, where both children were born, until they were able to build a small house at 1207 Elgin."

"In 1915 with Mary's inheritance, the Stevenson's bought the lot at 804 Harold Street. Joseph, fulfilling his desire to be an architect, designed his home for Houston's newest and most prestigious neighborhood, the Montrose Addition. To build the house, the Stevenson's hired E. L. Crain, founder of the Crain Ready Cut house Company. Crain was born in Longview, Texas on March 30, 1885 to Lula Brown Crain and E. E. Crain, pioneer druggist. In 1903 after attending Southwestern University at Georgetown, Crain moved to Houston where he first engaged in banking, then real estate, and finally construction. He married Anne Vive Carter, daughter of S. F. and Carrie Carter, on November 23, 1915, and had three sons, E. L. Crain Jr., Carter F. Crain, and Richard Crain."

Crain's rise to success can be described as meteoric. In 1912, Edward Lillo Crain was an Estate Officer at the Union National Bank and boarded at the YMCA. According to The National Register report for 804 Harold, "In 1915, Crain had just established the Crain Ready-Cut House Company, one of the first, and destined to become one of the largest prefabricated concerns in the world. Crain specialized in complete house building of colony houses for railroad, oil and mining companies. The company concept was to provide an economical, total package. It furnished plans and all construction materials, ready-cut, to eliminate waste. The New Encyclopedia of Texas, Vol. I, 1926 described "the material bill on these houses is complete to the last detail, windows, doors, woodwork, glass, paints, hardware, nails, lath, and roofing, with complete instructions for completing, going out with each order."

"On the other end of the spectrum Crane became a noted custom builder, constructing fine houses not only in the Montrose subdivision, but later in prestigious neighborhoods such as Southampton and River Oaks. He developed the popular subdivisions Garden Oaks, Southside Place, and parts of Riverside Terrace, Cherryhurst and Pineview. He also restored and operated Sylvan Beach, a nostalgic and popular entertainment park. Over the years, Crain provided houses for at least 25,000 Houstonians. His Grandson, Gene Crain, President of Crain Construction Co. Inc. currently continues the tradition as a custom residential contractor in Houston."

"The two-story house addresses its flat corner site with an advancing one-story, asymmetrical porch that wraps its southeast corner. A second floor glazed sleeping porch is above the east portion of the first floor porch. The front or south façade has a strong focus on the offset entry achieved by repeating gable details at the porch and second floor porch projection, both centering on the entrance. Multiple windows in the living room are repeated in the master bedroom above. A 1933 addition extends the left of the entry and repeats the gables, windows, massing, materials and details of the original architecture."

"The east elevation, facing Stanford Street, has its major emphasis on the first floor porch wrapping the southeast corner and on the second floor sleeping porch. Gables are repeated at each floor. The balance of the façade, lacking the softening effect of the deep porch, reinforces the two story cube form. Multiple banks of windows are again repeated on this façade. The rear or north façade shows the dominance of the major gable and the two story cube. A double set of casement windows at the breakfast room break with the typical sash window, but reinforce the Craftsman detailing."

"The west facade again reiterates the multi-gable theme and broken elevation of the front. The gables are offset to the right, with the two-story cube to the left. Window styles and details are consistent. The gabled staircase bay is exceeded by the 1933 addition, both to the right portion of the elevation."

"The simple four-square plan with asymmetrical entry has generous, airy rooms. The offset entry, with a staircase bay is open to the living room located on the south side of the house, directly behind are the kitchen and dining room. The utility room, butler's pantry, and breakfast room are to the rear or north. French doors between the dining room and the breakfast room create a 'Monticello' relationship. The staircase bay on the west leads up from the living room, meeting stairs from the kitchen at a landing, then up to a second floor central square hall with bedrooms at each corner. The second floor sleeping porch is off the master bedroom, at the southeast corner of the house."

"In 1933, a two-story addition on the southwest corner of the house included a garage with folding French door facing the front, and a small bedroom and bath addition on the second floor. Design of the addition was consistent with the original materials and form of the house. The owner is currently restoring the addition, reversing subsequent remodeling." At the time of writing, this project was as of yet incomplete, but has been completed in recent years.

"Prairie School influences are revealed in the horizontal emphasis of the continuous banding at the second floor window sill line. The massive rectangular porch supports with contrasting coping, and the solid balustrades with continuous coping, as well as the stucco exterior finish, exemplify Prairie School and Craftsman characteristics. The double hung windows with divided wooden muntins in the upper sash and single glazed lower sash are typical of such vernacular houses which blend Prairie School and Craftsman features. The horizontal banding, repeated window styles, materials, and details integrate the primarily Prairie School influenced front façade with the two-story cubed rear façade. The leaded glass in the entry-door and sidelights has an angular geometric design consistent with the stylistic movement. The interior finishes include simple moldings and trim, and oak flooring with inlay Mahogany borders. The fireplace with built in book case, is representative of Craftsman detailing."

"The only evidence of change to the exterior is the 1933 addition with subsequent alterations; enclosure of the rear utility porch; removal of the covered arbor connecting the garage and main house; and replacement of the first floor slate roofing shingles with composition shingles. The house, originally painted white, is now gray with white trim. Minor updating occurred in the interior over the years, with no structural changes. The original stair balustrade was altered, the original paper walls are now covered with drywall, the kitchen and baths were updated, and the original stained woodwork is now painted. Matlin Stevenson, daughter of the Stevensons, has the original dining room set purchased for the house and a grandfather clock that stood in the staircase. At the rear of the property is a two-story garage with living quarters and a 1972 carport addition which was enlarged and enclosed in April 1993."

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Joseph and Mary Stevenson House at 804 Harold is in very good repair and has been well maintained by all of its owners over the course of the last 90 years. The house exhibits only minor alterations to the historic structure which occurred primarily during a 1930's remodeling. According to the Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps of the property, a porte-cochere was added to the western side of the front façade after 1924 and probably dates to the 1930 remodeling of the structure. The porte-cochere blends seamlessly with the original structure and has since been closed in with multi light windows and French doors as found elsewhere on the building. A one-story covered corridor was constructed to the rear of the home which connects the main body of the home with the original, two-story, carriage-house located to the rear.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Fox, Stephen, Houston Architectural Guide, American Institute of Architects, 1999.

Houston City Directories, Morison and Fourmy Publishers various years 1910-1930

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company, Houston, Texas 1924-1950, Vol. 5, Sheet 547

"Stevenson, Joseph R. and Mary M. House" National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1996

Stewart and Stevenson, "History of Stewart and Stevenson" from www.stewartandstevenson.com.

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 PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION...:
Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Protected Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider three or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the Protected Landmark designation. If the HAHC reviews an application for designation of a Protected Landmark initiated after the designation of the Landmark, the HAHC shall review the basis for its initial recommendation for designation and may recommend designation of the landmark as a protected landmark unless the property owner elects to designate and if the landmark has met at least (3) three of the criteria of Section 33-224 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) at the time of its designation or, based upon additional information considered by the HAHC, the landmark then meets at least (3) three of criteria of Section 33-224 of the HPO, as follows:

S	NA	S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable
☐	☑	(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.

OR

☐ ☑ The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

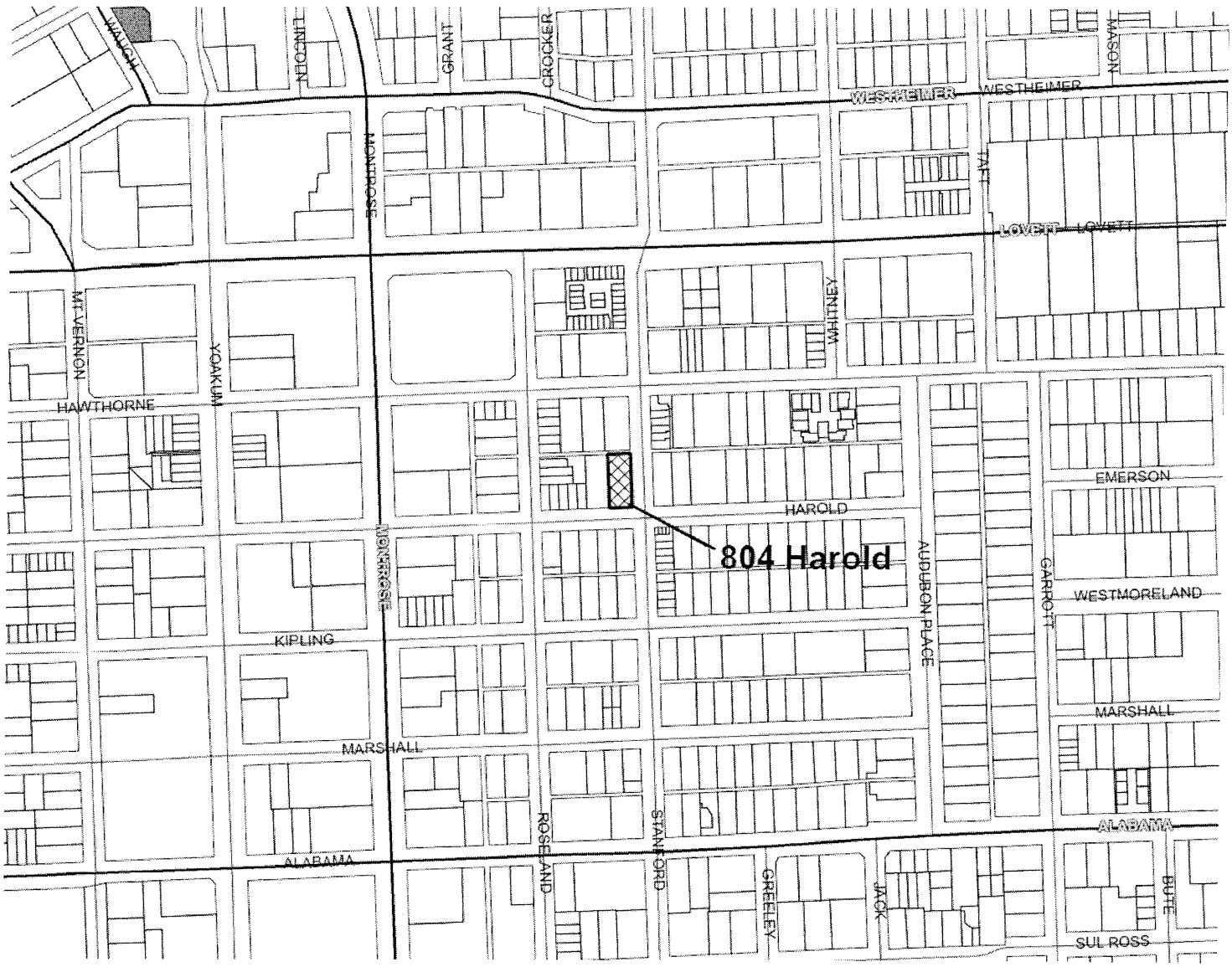
☑ ☐ The property was listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a "contributing structure" in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

OR

☐ ☑ The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission recommends to Houston City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Joseph and Mary Stevenson House at 804 Harold Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission **Planning and Development Department**

SITE LOCATION MAP
JOSEPH AND MARY STEVENSON HOUSE
804 HAROLD STREET
NOT TO SCALE