

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Hal and Iley Nunn Davis House  
**OWNERS:** Laurence C. Burns Jr. and Cynthia Burns  
**APPLICANTS:** Same as Owners  
**LOCATION:** 1915 Bellmeade Street, Houston, Texas  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** V.b  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 06PL32  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** 10-15-06  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** 11-16-06  
**P.C. HEARING DATE:** 11-30-06

### SITE INFORMATION

All that certain tract or parcel of land, a part of the A.C. Reynolds League in Harris County, Texas, beginning at the southeast corner of lot fifteen, block ten; thence in a westerly direction along the south line of said lot fifteen, 150 feet to a corner; thence in a northerly direction in a line drawn parallel to the east boundary line of said lot fifteen, 75 feet to a corner; thence in an easterly direction along the north line of said lot fifteen, 150 feet to the northeast corner of said lot 15; thence in a southerly direction along the east line of lot fifteen, 75 feet to the place of beginning, and being the east 75 x 150 feet out of lot fifteen (15) in block No. Ten (10) Country Club Estates Addition to The City of Houston, as shown by plat recorded in Harris County Map Records, Vol. 6, Page 63. Said tract is more commonly known per Harris county Appraisal District as Tract 15, Block 10, River Oaks Country Club Estate, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes an historic two-story, brick veneered residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Hal and Iley Nunn Davis House at 1915 Bellmeade, built in 1929, was designed in the Tudor style by renowned River Oaks Corporation architect, Charles Oliver. Oliver came to Houston from Dallas, where he had worked for the Russell Brown Company from 1916 to 1926. The Russell Brown Company is well known for its many stylish homes designed and constructed in the upscale neighborhoods of both Dallas and Houston. Hal Davis, a native of Tennessee, was a long time employee of the R.B. Everett Company, a construction equipment supply company founded in 1911. Iley Nunn Davis, born in 1896, is credited as the first female reporter for a Portland, Oregon, newspaper. The house qualifies for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation under criteria 3, 4, 5, and 6.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Hal and Iley Nunn Davis House at 1915 Bellmeade Road was built in 1928-1929 and designed by noted Houston architect, Charles Oliver, in the Tudor style. The house's first owners were Hal and Iley Nunn Davis, who moved into the home in 1929 with their two young children, Nancy, aged 8, and Hal Jr., aged 4. The family had previously lived in the independent southwest Houston municipality of Bellaire, Texas. The family occupied the house on Bellmeade for the next fifty years, until it was sold by surviving Davis family members after Mr. Davis's death in March 1978.

Hal Davis, a Tennessee native, was born in Union City, Tennessee and raised in Nashville. He met his wife Iley Nunn while attending Vanderbilt University in Nashville. After the couple moved to Houston, Texas in the early 1920's, the young Hal Davis took a job with the R. B. Everett Company, which sold construction equipment. He began his lengthy career with the company as a salesman and had risen to the position of company president by the time he retired in 1977. He later served on the company's Board of Directors. The R. B. Everett Co. is still in business today after 95 years in business.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

According to the current homeowners, Iley Nunn Davis was born on September, 3, 1896 and was the first female reporter for a newspaper in Portland, Oregon, where she lived with family while her husband served in France during World War I. Mrs. Davis' journalism experience was put to good use as the editor for the River Oaks Magazine for many years before publication ceased during World War II. Mrs. Davis died September 7, 1980.

The house was designed by noted Houston architect, Charles Oliver, who was the staff architect for the River Oaks Corporation from 1926-1931. Oliver was a native of Dallas and had previously worked in the architectural/construction firm of the Russell Brown Company, which constructed many of the homes and buildings in both Dallas and Houston during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Oliver worked for the Russell Brown Company from 1916 until 1926, when he began working for the River Oaks Corporation. Oliver would eventually design 75 homes in the upscale River Oaks neighborhood. Other examples of his work may be seen at 1407 Kirby Drive, 2970 Lazy Lane, 2508 Pelham Drive, 1903 Bellmeade Road, 2011 Bellmeade Road, and 3358 Inwood Drive. He also designed the personal home of Mr. and Mrs. Mike Hogg, developer of River Oaks, at 2007 River Oaks Boulevard.

According to an article about River Oaks published in the Handbook of Texas Online, River Oaks was developed "by Buffalo Bayou and Memorial Park in west central Houston. The residential garden suburb, which comprises 1,100 acres, was developed in the 1920s by Michael Hogg and attorney, Hugh Potter, who in 1923 obtained an option to purchase 200 acres surrounding the River Oaks Country Club. In 1924 Hogg organized Country Club Estates to promote the development. The two developers retained Kansas City landscape architects, Hare and Hare, to provide a master plan that would protect the environmental integrity and natural beauty of the area. They also hired J. C. Nichols, who built one of the first major shopping centers in the United States, to serve as a design consultant. The master plan included homesites, a fifteen-acre campus for River Oaks Elementary School, two shopping centers, and esplanades planted with flowers. It called for underground utility lines, eliminated alleys, allowed only three intersecting streets, provided rigid building codes, and eventually banned all commercial traffic. Deed restrictions and centralized community control assured exclusivity; approval of house designs by a panel of architects and citizens and a purchase price of at least \$7,000 were required. The first home in the area, built by Will and Sue Clayton, is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Among the other notable houses is Ima Hogg's family home, Bayou Bend (N. R.; City of Houston Landmark), designed by John F. Staub and Birdsall P. Briscoe. In the late 1920s the development lost money, but by the late 1930s developers had invested \$3 million in the project, and the community had begun to influence development patterns downtown. In the 1930s River Oaks was at the geographic center of Houston. The community operated independently for three years, after which it was annexed by the city."

### **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:**

The style of the Hal and Iley Nunn Davis House is a local interpretation of the New England Colonial style, which has its roots in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century England. According to noted Houston author and architectural historian Stephen Fox, the house is "a contextual salute by Charles Oliver" to the 1926 Kemerton Dean House (City Landmark) located across the street at 1912 Bellmeade and designed by John Staub. According to the applicants, "Oliver's design is influenced by the English country cottage tradition. His design for 1915 Bellmeade incorporates the use of brick with special brick detail, a steeply sloped roof with dormers and broken roof lines and a massive, prominent chimney in the front of the house. The aesthetically pleasing, studied asymmetry is evident and its character and uniqueness are results of breaking the house into distinct parts. The large steel casement windows were modifications to the traditional style and along with cross ventilation helped bring in natural breezes before air conditioning. There is a large covered front porch and porch on the south side of the house accessible from the living room. The use of large, hand-hewn oak, timbers for the porch columns



# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

- (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 the Houston Planning Commission recommends to the Houston City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Hal and Iley Nunn Davis House located at 1915 Bellmeade Street.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP  
HAL AND ILEY NUNN DAVIS HOUSE  
1915 BELLMEADE STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

