

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Joseph H. Russell House
OWNERS: Lisa and David Mossy
APPLICANT: Same as Owners
LOCATION: 2232 Brentwood Drive – River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IId
HPO FILE NO.: 07L177
DATE ACCEPTED: March 25, 2007
HAHC HEARING: Apr-25-07
PC HEARING: May-10-07

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 25 and Track 24A, Block 47, River Oaks Section 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is an historic two-story brick veneered residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The house at 2232 Brentwood Drive was the home of noted Gulf Oil executive, Joseph H. Russell. The home, designed in the English-Tudor style, was built as a large speculative home by the Russell Brown Company in 1929. The Russell Brown Company was a noted Houston building firm, founded in Houston in 1906. The company built a number of stylish and important houses in Houston in the Avondale, Broadacres, Montrose, River Oaks, and Westmoreland neighborhoods as well as homes in San Antonio, Dallas, and other Texas cities. The property meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The home at 2232 Brentwood Drive was built as a speculative home and completed in early 1929. On April 14, 1929, the Houston Post ran an advertisement encouraging buyers to attend an open house of an “English home located at 2232 Brentwood Drive in River Oaks.” Approximately two weeks later, on April 28, 1929, the Houston Post ran a large article entitled “Russell Buys in River Oaks.” The article featured a large picture of the home and comments including:

“Mrs. Russell was busy the latter part of the week with preparations for the removal. Her new home will be furnished with an unusually fine selection of antiques. She and Mr. Russell have been collecting pieces suited to their tastes over a period of several years in anticipation of the time when they would move into their permanent home.”

“The new Russell residence is a brick and stone structure facing south on Brentwood Drive only a short distance from Pine Valley Court and the Pine Valley Sunken Gardens... It includes a large reception hall, living room, library, dining room, breakfast room and kitchen downstairs. Upstairs there are four bedrooms and a sleeping porch.”

The article further states the trend of Gulf Coast company executives choosing to make River Oaks their home, citing five other executives who were either building or purchasing existing homes. The article also indicates that Henry Stubee served as architect to Russell Brown Company, although the plans do not include the architect’s name. On this same day, a companion article appeared in the Houston Chronicle that talked about plaster walls trimmed with birch on the main rooms on the first floor and a “hot air heating plant” in the home.

Joseph H. Russell, the first owner of 2232 Brentwood Drive, was born in Bonham, Texas in 1882. He came to Houston in 1915 at the age of 23. In 1929, when he purchased 2232 Brentwood, he was listed in the City Directory as Production Supervisor of Gulf Production Company. His office was on the 15th floor of the Gulf

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Building, located at 712 Main Street downtown. Over the years, Russell ascended the ranks within the company. In 1941, he was Assistant to the Vice President, and by 1953, he had achieved the rank of Vice President of Gulf Oil Corporation, Gulf Refining Company, and Canadian Gulf Company, and President of West Texas Gulf Pipeline Company, Project Fine Pipeline Company, and Tabbs Bay Oil Company.

According to the Texas Handbook Online, Gulf Oil Corporation was an expansion of the J. M. Guffey Petroleum Company, which was organized in May 1901, and which acquired the interests of individuals in the Spindletop Oilfield. In this company, organized to exploit the new oil discovery, Guffey had a seven-fifteenths interest, while A. W. and R. B. Mellon and some others owned the balance. Later in 1901, the same men organized the Gulf Refining Company of Texas for the purpose of refining and marketing the crude oil produced by the Guffey Company, and a refinery was built at Port Arthur. Gulf Oil continued in Texas until the 1980s when the board voted to sell the company to Chevron (Standard Oil of California) for \$13.2 billion following a hostile takeover attempt from Thomas Boone Pickens.

Mr. Russell spent his entire career with Gulf Oil and retired in the late 1950s. In 1955, the Russells sold the home to Charles H. Maddox, the owner of Maddox Construction Company. On December 5, 1965, Mr. Russell died and the obituary listed his activities in the community including: charter member of River Oaks Baptist Church, and member of River Oaks Country Club, Houston Club, and Phi Delta Theta fraternity.

According to Stephen Fox, the Russell Brown Company was a Houston-based architectural design and construction company. It was chartered in 1906 by Russell Brown who was born on December 12, 1875 in Taylor, Texas and came to Houston in 1902. The company was a prolific builder and designer of new houses in Houston from 1902 until the early 1940s. Brown expanded his operations by opening branch offices in Dallas by 1916, San Antonio by 1922 and Los Angeles, California in 1923. The firm specialized in house design and construction, but also designed several commercial buildings in Houston in the 1920s as well as the six-story Guaranty State Bank and Simpson Office Building in Ardmore, Oklahoma (1917), and the Schlumberger Building in Houston (1936).

The Russell Brown Company constructed numerous houses in the Westmoreland, Montrose, Boulevard Oaks, and River Oaks neighborhoods in Houston and the Dallas subdivision of Munger Place. The company was the general contractor of such notable Houston houses as the William S. Farish house in Shadyside (1925) and the Cleveland Sewall House in River Oaks (1926, National Historic Landmark). The major houses it designed and built were the Herbert L. Kokernot House in Monte Vista in San Antonio (1928), the O.L. Seagraves House at the Mo-Ranch near Hunt (1929), the Talbott F. Rothwell House in Beaumont (1929) and the W.B. Morgan House in Olmos Park Estates in Olmos Park (1931). Among the architects who worked at various times for the Russell Brown Company in Houston were A. N. Dawson, Charles W. Oliver, Mike Mebane, and Gonzalo Ancira. In an indication of the quality of the Russell Brown architects, River Oaks Corporation hired one of Russell Brown's architects, Charles Oliver, as in-house architect in 1926.

Additional information on the Russell Brown Company comes from a company brochure published circa 1936 which notes the following:

“The restful harmony and careful designing, the elegance imparted by graceful simplicity marks the difference between Russell Brown Company homes and the regular run of places so often built.”

Russell Brown retired from the building business around the time of World War II. He lived in retirement at his ranch near Juliff, Texas, south of Houston, where he died in 1963.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The house at 2232 Brentwood Drive is an interpretation of the English Tudor style. The English Tudor style was one of several historic architectural styles, along with French Norman and others, which experienced a renaissance in popularity during the 1920s and 1930s and which are collectively grouped during this time period as part of the “Manorial” or “Period” style. The home is situated on a historic block in River Oaks, with two other City of Houston Landmark houses on the block. The exterior looks as it did in 1929 with red brick and an arched stone-trimmed doorway. Above the doorway are four leaded glass windows. The home is three-stories with a steeply pitched roof. A prominent chimney rises on the east side of the home. The home’s interior utilizes plaster walls and birch wood trim. An elegant curving staircase, which leads to the second floor, is located in the entry way.

The current owners, Lisa and David Mossy, are planning a restoration and addition to the existing home that will not impact the façade. Anticipated changes include the addition of a new one-story sun porch; a new mudroom; refurbishment of the existing air conditioning, plumbing, security and electrical systems; renovation of the kitchen and four bathrooms; relocation of the pool and enhanced landscaping; and renovation of the garage.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/dog2.html> (accessed March 21, 2007).

Houston Post, “Joe Russell home on Brentwood”, April 28, 1929.

Houston Chronicle, April 28, 1929.

Houston Chronicle, Obituary of Joseph H. Russell, December 5, 1965.

Houston Chronicle, Obituary of Russell Brown, April 9, 1963.

River Oaks Scrapbooks, Volumes 9 and 10.

Houston Architectural Survey, 1980.

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:

The HAHC and the Planning 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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(1));	
<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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(2));	

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- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(3);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(4);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(6);
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present (Sec. 33-224(a)(7);
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride (Sec. 33-224(a)(8).
- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Joseph H. Russell House at 2232 Brentwood Drive.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
JOSEPH H. RUSSELL HOUSE
2232 BRENTWOOD DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

