

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Jacques P. Adoue House**OWNER:** Ronald and Janice Smulcer**APPLICANT:** Same as Owner**LOCATION:** 2135 Looscan Lane - River Oaks**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A**AGENDA ITEM:** Iif**HPO FILE NO.:** 07L179**DATE ACCEPTED:** Mar-21-07**HAHC HEARING:** Apr-25-07**PC HEARING:** May-10-07**SITE INFORMATION:**

Lot 5, Block 50, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes an historic two-story residence built.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:**

The Colonial Revival style home, located at 2135 Looscan Lane, was built as a speculative home in 1936-1937 by the Russell Brown Company, a noted Houston building firm. The Russell Brown Company was founded in Houston in 1906 and built a number of stylish and important houses in Houston, San Antonio, Dallas and other Texas cities. The home was owned and occupied for many years by prominent Houston oil and gas attorney, Jacques P. Adoue, who worked both domestically and internationally, as independent council and as council for Superior Oil Company. The house qualifies for Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 2135 Looscan Lane was built as a speculative home and completed in early 1937. On March 21, 1937, the Houston Chronicle ran an advertisement encouraging buyers to attend an open house:

“Just completed, a beautiful home, on an extra wide lot, with two large trees. Unusually roomy house, with numerous extra built-in features. Arrangement includes front entry, central stair hall, large plastered living room, paneled library, screened porch, lavatory, wainscoted dining room, breakfast room, kitchen and covered rear entry.”

The advertisement featured a drawing of the home which looks today as it did when it was built. Given the economy at the time, it was almost two years before the home was purchased by Jacques P. Adoue. On February 12, 1939, the Houston Chronicle ran a large photograph of the home with the byline, “This eight-room home...at 2135 Looscan Lane was purchased by J. P. Adoue for \$14,000.”

Soon thereafter, the River Oaks Magazine wrote about the family’s arrival in the New Neighbors section.

“Mr. and Mrs. Jacques P. Adoue and their son Jacques Junior are now in their new residence at 2135 Looscan Lane. The house is white painted brick and clapboard construction and is distinguished by its ell-shaped wing, its small arched stoop and a huge oak tree which fits into the picture as an important part of the house... Mr. Adoue is an attorney for the Superior Oil Company.”

Jacques P. Adoue was born in 1902. He was named for his grandfather, Jacques Adoue, the youngest of three brothers who came to Texas from Aurignae, France, in the 1860s. The grandfather was a banker/merchant in Calvert, Texas where he constructed a building in 1884 which bears his name. The Texas Historic Marker on the building reads: "Relic of colorful career of Jacques Adoue (1851 – 1906), youngest of three French brothers

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

who came to Texas (1860s) to become Calvert, Dallas, and Galveston business leaders. Jacques Adoue owned numerous enterprises. This store, built in 1884 for Collat, Adoue, and Risser Dry Goods, set an ambitious style for the town.”

Jacques P. Adoue was an attorney in Houston specializing in oil and gas. He graduated from Sewanee Military Academy in 1918, and continued his education at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. He then attended the University of Texas where he obtained an undergraduate degree in 1922 and a law degree in 1925. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was working as an attorney for Superior Oil Company when the family moved to 2135 Looscan Lane.

According to Jacques P. Adoue, Jr., his father trekked around the world representing various oil companies after leaving Superior Oil Company. They lived in both Europe and South America for extended periods. He served as counsel to the Chinese National Oil Company in Taiwan towards the end of his career. During these extended absences, the family would lease out 2135 Looscan Lane. During Adoue's career, he formed partnerships including Rowe and Adoue (Esperson Building, 1951) and Adoue and Skipworth (1926 West Gray, 1956). His grandson, Jacques P. Adoue, III, says that Adoue had been offered the lead counsel position at Superior Oil, but declined due to a desire to maintain his independence.

One interesting feature of the home is a full darkroom that the current owner discovered in the attic. According to his son, his father was an avid photographer and developed his photographs in the attic. He was also chairman of the State Bar of Texas - Oil, Gas, and Energy Resources Law Section (1952-53), a member of the Texas and American Bar Associations, and a member of Trinity Episcopal Church.

Jacques P. Adoue, Jr., had many fond memories of the home located at 2135 Looscan Lane. As a pre-teen, he and his friends would ride bikes down to the Majestic and Metropolitan Theaters, eat a “coney” from James Coney Island, and the entire day would cost 25 cents.

Jacques P. Adoue sold the home in 1983 and died on May 3, 1992 in Montgomery County at the age of 90. The house was then owned by Marisue D. Tallichet (1983-1996), Henry Wuertz (1996-2003), the Franklin family (2003-2006), and the current owners, Ron and Janice Smulcer.

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 opened 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 its architects, Charles Oliver, as in-house architect in 1926.

Additional information on the Russell Brown Company comes from a company brochure published around 1936. It boasts of:

“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.”

The following is a partial list of the many Russell Brown Company houses, with an emphasis on River Oaks:

- 1805 Kirby Drive, Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Roy G. Cullen.
- Home of Mr. and Mrs. Jack R. Tenison (corner of Kirby and Brentwood).
- 3258 Avalon Drive.
- 2131 Pelham Drive (demolished).
- 3235 Reba Drive (demolished).
- 3238 Ella Lee Lane (demolished).
- 1216 South Shepherd Drive.
- Home of Captain A.S. Hansen, Port Arthur, Texas.
- Home for Dr. and Mrs. John Foster at 1708 River Oaks Boulevard (demolished), 1980 Architectural Survey.
- Home for Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Smith at 3217 Inwood Drive, 1980 Architectural Survey.
- 2144 Brentwood Drive, 1929.
- 2224 Brentwood Drive, 1929.
- 2510 Inwood Drive, 1929.
- 2125 Pine Valley Drive, 1930.
- 2240 Looscan Lane, 1931 (demolished).
- 2940 Del Monte Drive, 1930.
- 1517 Kirby Drive, 1931.
- 3016 Chevy Chase, 1931.
- 2514 Brentwood, 1931.
- 2235 Brentwood, 1937.
- 2247 Del Monte, 1937.
- 2235 Brentwood, 1937.
- 2419 Del Monte, 1937.
- 2153 Pelham, 1938.
- 3235 Reba, 1938 (demolished).

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, until he died in 1963.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The 1936-37 Russell Brown Company house located at 2135 Looscan Lane was designed in the Colonial Revival style. The home is two stories with prominent forward facing square bay. The building site is on a gentle curve on Looscan Lane. The exterior appearance of the home looks as it did upon its completion in 1937 with a white clapboard exterior with a bay window on the north side. The front door is welcoming with two stairs leading to a small arched stoop. As mentioned previously, the home maintains the original darkroom installed by Jacques P. Adoue when he owned the home. Other interesting features of the home include: corner

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

built-in cabinets and floor buzzer for summoning servants in dining room (a Russell Brown Company standard), carved staircase railing, cedar closet, and glass door knobs.

Over the past two years, this block of Looscan Lane has seen three of its older homes torn down and replaced with very large (5000+ square feet) speculative homes. The current owners, Ron and Janice Smulcer, are planning a restoration and addition to the existing home. Anticipated changes include:

- A new hexagon window to replace the one removed from original house.
- Restoring the front porch to original design – lighting, front door.
- Hardy plank to replace vinyl siding added in the 1980s.
- Removing parking space appendage to driveway.
- Extensive landscaping that will include vintage plantings.
- Restoring interior wood floors to original quality.
- Replacing carpeting with wood flooring in all of the 1980s addition to the house.
- Renovating kitchen, master bedroom, and four bathrooms in a way that is sensitive to those of that period.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Houston Chronicle, March 21, 1937, “Open Today”.

Houston Chronicle, February 12, 1939, “Home bought by J.P. Adoue”.

River Oaks Magazine, “New Neighbors”, April 1939.

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

Houston Chronicle, Obituary of Jacques P. Adoue, May 3, 1992.

River Oaks Scrapbooks, Volumes 9, 10, 15 and 16.

Houston Architectural Survey, 1980.

Historic Calvert Tour, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~txrober2/HistoricCalvertTour-Commercial.htm>.

Interview by the owner of Jacques P. Adoue, Jr. and Jacques P. Adoue, III.

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**

- | S | NA |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(1));
- (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));

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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 Jacques P. Adoue House at 2135 Looscan Lane.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP
JACQUES P. ADOUE HOUSE
2135 LOOSCAN
NOT TO SCALE

