

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Kropp-Crickmer House  
**OWNERS:** Dana Antake-Horning and Jeff Horning  
**APPLICANT:** Same as Owners  
**LOCATION:** 12923 Memorial Drive  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** I.d  
**HPO FILE NO:** 07L187  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jul-30-07  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Aug-22-07  
**PC HEARING DATE:** Aug-30-07

### SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 7, Block 1, Memorial Bend Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Kropp-Crickmer House at 12923 Memorial Drive, completed in early 1956, was designed by noted Houston architect, David Wauchope Crockett. Bob Pine was the general contractor. During World War II, Crockett and Pine both enrolled at West Point, graduating in 1945. Crockett and Pine continued their association upon coming to Houston, where Pine built many modern houses in Houston during the post-war years. Crockett was active in Houston's American Institute of Architects, where he served as treasurer. Crockett and his wife were among the founding members of the Unitarian Fellowship of Houston.

The Kropp-Crickmer House represents a significant example of both postwar modern architecture and the contemporary houses built in and around the Memorial Bend subdivision in the 1950s. Developed by Robert Puig and architect William Floyd, Memorial Bend was unusual in Houston because of the proportions of the modern homes built there. According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, "Floyd's architectural preference for undemonstrative modern style [gave] Memorial Bend an inherent quality lacking in the surrounding neighborhoods of west Memorial."<sup>1</sup> The modern, flat-roofed house was built with solid walls of load-bearing, pink Mexican brick alternating with walls clad with redwood siding. All windows face into internal courtyards containing concrete patios and walkways with a grass-green top coat. A porte-cochere, supported by a curved brick wall mimicking the shape of the driveway, provides covered parking and leads to the main entry. The sophisticated plan of the home, with its alternating brick and glass walls and multiple courtyards, suggests the influence of Harwood Taylor. Taylor was a prolific member of Houston's informal Miesian "school" of architecture that flourished in the 1950s and early 1960s, and he was "inspired to explore cutting edge Miesian modern design through the example (and encouragement) of Philip Johnson."<sup>2</sup> The home was first occupied by Willis A. and Cornelia Kropp, who lived in the house from 1956-1960; the second owners, Margaret S. and Charles D. Crickmer, lived in the house until 2006. The home meets Criteria 4, 5 and 6 for designation as a Landmark.

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Fox, *Houston Architectural Guide*, second ed. (Houston: American Institute of Architects), 1999, 300.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Koush, *Booming Houston and the Modern House: The Residential Architecture of Neihaus and Taylor, 1955-1960* (Houston: Houston Mod), 2006, 19.

## HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Kropp-Crickmer House at 12923 Memorial Drive was designed by David W. Crockett (1924-1993) and completed in early 1956 as indicated on the original construction documents in possession of the current owners. This modern, flat-roofed house is built with solid walls of load-bearing, pink Mexican brick alternating with areas of fenestration and wood framed walls clad in redwood siding. All windows face into internal courtyards containing concrete patios and walkways with a grass-green top coat. A porte-cochere, supported by a curved brick wall mimicking the shape of the driveway, provides covered parking and leads to the main entry. Bob Pine, who built many modern houses in Houston during the post-war years, was the general contractor.

Born in Fort Worth, Texas, on February 8, 1924, David Wauchope Crockett was the great-great-grandson of Davy Crockett (1786-1836),<sup>3</sup> frontiersman, three-term congressman for Tennessee, and one of the Texas heroes who perished at the Alamo.

From 1940-1942, Crockett studied at North Texas Agricultural College (now North Texas State College) in Denton. During World War II, he enrolled at West Point, along with future Houston developer Bob Pine; both men graduated in 1945.<sup>4</sup> In 1947, Crockett married Judith Carr (then a stewardess for American Airlines) with whom he had two sons and two daughters.<sup>5</sup> Crockett completed subsequent military service in 1949 and was discharged as a Captain in the United States Army Air Corps. That year, Crockett relocated to Colorado, where he attended the University of Denver; he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in architecture in 1952.<sup>6</sup> He then moved to Houston, where he enrolled at Rice Institute (now Rice University) and earned a Bachelor of Science in architecture in 1954. Crockett was employed with Thompson McCleary & Associates as a draftsman where he designed side projects, such as the Crickmer House, and assisted with Meyerland Plaza (1957).<sup>7</sup> In 1957, Crockett became a registered architect; later, he was registered to practice in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, and Illinois. In 1958, he became a member of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Crockett joined Welton Beckett Associates, where he worked as a Project Architect on the Phillips Petroleum Building (1963) located in Oklahoma.<sup>8</sup> In 1963, Crockett joined Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson -- one of the local supervising architectural firms for the Humble Oil & Refining Co. Building (1963), which was designed by Los Angeles architect Welton Beckett. Between 1964 and 1970, Crockett worked independently at his own architectural firm. Projects from this period include the Green & Green Manufacturing Building (1968), the Hill House (1968), the Nakfor House (1968), the Black Angus Club (1969), and the Hancock Building (1969).<sup>9</sup> Crockett returned to Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson as a partner and worked with John Bertini on the design of One Allen Center.<sup>10</sup> He was also involved with the Houston Post Building (1970) and One Shell Plaza (1971) designed by the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's with Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson as the supervising architect.<sup>11</sup>

In 1972, S. I. Morris and Eugene Aubrey left the firm, which was then renamed Wilson, Crain, Anderson & Reynolds (later C/A Associates).<sup>12</sup> Crockett remained with Wilson, Crain, Anderson & Reynolds and

<sup>3</sup> Obituary, *Houston Chronicle*, December 5, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Bob Pine, July 9, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with Patrick Crockett, July 16, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Transcript, Office of Registrar, University of Denver.

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence with Terry Kurtin (daughter), July 7, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Gilbert Thweatt, August 7, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *Guide to Architects*, third edition (American Institute of Architects), 1970.

<sup>10</sup> John Wiegman, *His Story: A Personal History of Morris Architects*, 2001, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Kurtin.

<sup>12</sup> "Ralph Anderson, 61, Architect in Southwest," *New York Times*, February 6, 1990.

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was likely involved with the University of Texas' Frank Erwin Center (1977).<sup>13</sup> In the early 1980s, Talbot Wilson established his own practice and Crockett joined him, where he assisted in the construction administration of the Huntingdon Building (1983).<sup>14</sup> After 44 years of practicing architecture, Crockett retired in September 1992.<sup>15</sup>

Crockett was active in the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects, serving as treasurer in 1971,<sup>16</sup> as well as with The Boy Scouts of America and The West Point Society.<sup>17</sup> He and his wife were among the founding members of the Unitarian Fellowship of Houston.<sup>18</sup> Crockett, along with fellow member and architect Harry Fulcher (who designed the Mecom Fountain), designed and directed Unitarian Fellowship volunteers in building a "teahouse" at the Spring Branch YMCA on Campbell Road (since demolished).<sup>19</sup>

The Kropp-Crickmer House represents a significant example of both post-war modern architecture and the contemporary houses built in and around the Memorial Bend subdivision in the 1950s. Developed by Robert Puig and architect William Floyd (1911-2004), Memorial Bend was unusual in Houston because of the large proportion of modern houses. Advertisements appearing in local newspapers proclaimed that Memorial Bend offered heavily wooded tracts, houses priced between \$16,000 to \$30,000, all of the desired amenities of the day, and a location only 20 minutes from downtown Houston.<sup>20</sup> According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, "Floyd's architectural preference for undemonstrative modern style [gave] Memorial Bend an inherent quality lacking in the surrounding neighborhoods of west Memorial."<sup>21</sup> This quality of design was noted in the local press almost immediately. According to an article in the *Houston Chronicle* from December 1955:

*Houston Architects consider Houston a conservative city as it relates to home planning. Architects feel there is a more ready acceptance now more than ever before of the so called open planning of homes. Perhaps the open planning is more evident in the Memorial Drive area than elsewhere due partly to the heavily wooded sites there.*<sup>22</sup>

The sophisticated plan of the Kropp-Crickmer House, with its alternating brick and glass walls and multiple courtyards, suggests the influence of Harwood Taylor (1927-1989). Taylor was a prolific member of Houston's informal Miesian "school" of architecture, which flourished in the 1950s and early 1960s, and whose adherents were "inspired to explore cutting edge Miesian modern design through the example (and encouragement) of Philip Johnson."<sup>23</sup> Taylor designed a number of similar small, brick-walled courtyard houses that were published in the local and national press.

The Kropp-Crickmer House shares characteristics of one of Taylor's early houses, the Watson House (1955), which was published in *Arts & Architecture* in October 1955. Both have similar porte-cocheres, courtyards with walls comprised of solid Mexican load-bearing brick, floor-to-ceiling glass panels, and mahogany veneered interior woodwork. Two of Taylor's other early houses, the McCartney House

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with David Sears, The Wingfield/Sears Group, Inc., 13 July 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Conversation with Mickey Sheppard, Morris Architects, 10 July 2007

<sup>15</sup> Obituary, *Houston Chronicle*, Thursday, 9 December, 1993

<sup>16</sup> American Institute of Architects, *Guide to Architects*, 1983

<sup>17</sup> Conversation with Patrick Crockett, 16 July 2007

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with Betty Oertel, Unitarian Fellowship of Houston historian, 17 July 2007

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence with Maxine Barkan, 17 July 2007

<sup>20</sup> Memorial Bend advertisement, *Houston Chronicle*, 29 June 1958

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Fox. *Houston Architectural Guide*, second ed. (Houston: American Institute of Architects), 1999, 300.

<sup>22</sup> *Houston Chronicle*, Friday, 30 December 1955

<sup>23</sup> Ben Koush, *Booming Houston and the Modern House: The Residential Architecture of Neihaus and Taylor, 1955-1960* (Houston: Houston Mod), 2006, 19.

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(1956) and the Electri-living House (1957), exhibit how Taylor developed this vocabulary in different projects. Taylor's Houston contemporaries (Howard Barnstone, Burdette Keeland, and William R. Jenkins) also designed modern courtyard houses using a similar selection of materials that were published in the local and national press. Bob Pine recalled that he worked with Jenkins, in particular, on a number of projects.<sup>24</sup> It seems likely that Crockett would have been aware of such projects being built at the time, by either reading about them or visiting them through his professional contacts.

Willis A. Kropp, an engineer, and his wife Cornelia lived in the house from 1956-1960; the second owners, Margaret S. and Charles D. Crickmer (also an engineer) lived in the house until 2006, at which time the present owners, Dana Antake-Horning and Jeff Horning, purchased the home to rehabilitate for their own use.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The house is set back on the site and abuts the utility corridor, providing privacy for its occupants (*see plans*). One enters the structure via a large gate (construction plans call out louvered doors) opening to a courtyard and an entry loggia once articulated by a privacy screen separating the dining terrace from the entry. (The privacy screen no longer exists.)

Upon entering the house, one comes to a small foyer finished with 8" x 8" square, pale green, matte glazed Mexican floor tiles. To the left, a hallway leads to the sleeping areas. The living room, family room and dining are to the immediate right and are separated from one another by a freestanding, full height partition, which was originally also intended to serve as a plenum for the mechanical system to distribute air to the adjacent, open areas (*see plans*). That it was not built this way probably reflects the builder's preference for a more conventional air conditioning system layout. The partition features an unsigned, undated mural depicting figures in fanciful, Eastern costumes, which will be maintained as an original feature. A full-length fluorescent light fixture with a redwood valance illuminates the artwork.

Floor-to-ceiling fixed glass windows with redwood frames flank both sides of the living areas and allow for southern and northern light from adjacent courtyards. Interior doors are flush-slab stained mahogany. None have been painted and all will be refinished for reinstallation. According to the construction drawings, the floors were to be finished with cork floor tile (currently red oak planks). Walls and ceiling were painted with a base-coat of sea-foam green alternating with unpainted Mexican brick and glass window assemblies. The plans call for a sliding accordion screen separating the family room from the living room, but this is no longer present. Per the construction plans, the exterior doors at this area featured a second louvered screen door to allow natural ventilation during pleasant weather. All exterior siding of the house, as well as the window frames are comprised of clear heart redwood

The kitchen/breakfast area featured stained, wood-veneered cabinets and Formica countertops. Although the floor was specified to be finished with cork tile, sheet linoleum was installed. A skylight admits additional light to the kitchen with courtyard windows illuminating the breakfast area. Immediately to the rear of the kitchen is a small courtyard, which opens to a larger courtyard containing a covered terrace. During construction, the southernmost brick wall of the courtyard was shifted an additional six feet to the south to allow for a gated opening to access the backyard. Modification to the original grade beam placement is evident, as the beam has been crudely terminated due to its having been poured prior to the previously mentioned alteration.

The sleeping areas feature two children's bedrooms, two full baths, and a master bedroom. Directly off the hall leading to the bedrooms is a mechanical closet and storage closet. This area was modified from

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<sup>24</sup> Conversation with Bob Pine.

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the original plan during construction as the plan depicts a vertical supply and return air plenum, which was replaced by a storage closet in the hall and a linen closet in the adjoining bathroom.

Bathrooms were finished simply with wood veneer cabinets (construction documents indicate cabinet doors were to be sliding peg board type), Formica countertops, and complementary wood-veneered medicine cabinets. Floors and walls surrounding the bathtub were finished with ¾" square, pale green glass tiles. Skylights provide natural light.

The children's bedrooms flank a partially covered courtyard identified on the original plans as a "Children's Play Yard." Both bedrooms have doors accessing the courtyard – these doors were to originally possess a second louvered door as well. Both bedrooms were to have cork tile flooring but are finished instead with red oak plank. Walls are painted gypsum board with the easternmost bedroom having a brick wall. Conical, metal, adjustable wall sconces are located adjacent to doors.

The master bedroom and its adjacent bathroom open to a courtyard identified on original plans as a "Solarium." This courtyard once enclosed a Post Oak tree, which resulted in numerous modifications to its walls over the years to accommodate a large, low-slung tree limb (*see* Exhibit B). The plan of the master bedroom was enlarged during construction with the Solarium reduced by approximately three feet. This allowed for a walk-in closet, which replaced a typical smaller closet with sliding door. The master bathroom is finished with millwork similar to that of the children's bathroom. The toilet is separated from the walk-in shower by a partition of exposed brick with a decorative translucent glass panel in its uppermost section. The same glass was also used in the glass shower door and transom. The walls of the shower are exposed brick with a full-height fixed window facing the courtyard. Finally, the bathroom floor is finished with ¾" square, pale green glass tile.

The house was in relatively original condition when purchased in late 2006, the only major alteration being a workshop added to the rear of the house. This addition appears to have been built for the original owners, as a 1958 newspaper (used for insulation) was found in and removed from an exhaust fan opening. The workshop was not attached to the house with proper construction techniques and, as a result, seriously jeopardizes the integrity of the roof structure. The addition is structurally unsound and currently kept from partial collapse by temporary wood supports.

All infrastructure (electrical, plumbing and HVAC) is to be removed and upgraded to current code with energy efficiency as a personal mandate. Because portions of the structure were compromised by lack of maintenance and termite infestation -- and roof, sill & top plates, bathroom walls due to high moisture, etc.-- all interior walls will be exposed in order to access structural components for repair and replacement, if necessary.

Minor space plan changes are proposed at the bathrooms and kitchen to improve layout. An additional closet will be added in the master bedroom. All windows will be replaced with tempered glass. Finishes will be consistent with those used in post-war modern houses: linoleum, Formica, glass tile, and patterned carpet. Architectural details throughout the structure will be cleanly executed in the spirit of the original design. The new exterior will be consistent with the overall concept, with use of engineered wood siding (in lieu the existing redwood, which has rotted in areas); cementitious panel will be utilized at the fascia. The existing flat roof, which was compromised through inappropriate repair over the years, will be removed to the substrate and replaced with a modified bitumen roof system with a white wear course.

The property will be regraded to improve drainage around the perimeter of the house. New landscaping will also be planted based on contemporary published sources such as *Gardens are for People* (1955) by San Francisco landscape architect Thomas D. Church (1902-1972).

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*The information and sources provided by the owner for this application have been reviewed and edited by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, 713/837-7796 or Randy.Pace@cityofhouston.net.*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

“Architect in Southwest,” Ralph Anderson, 61, *New York Times*, February 6, 1990.

Correspondence by owners with Maxine Barkan, July 2007.

Correspondence by owners with Terry Kurtin (daughter of Crockett), July 2007.

Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*, second ed. (Houston: American Institute of Architects), 1999.

*Guide to Architects*, American Institute of Architects, 1970; 1983.

*Houston Chronicle*, December 5, 1993; December 9, 1993; Memorial Bend Advertisement, June 29, 1958; December 30, 1955.

Interview by owners with Patrick Crockett (son of Crockett), July 2007.

Interview by owners with Betty Oertel, historian, Unitarian Fellowship of Houston, July 2007.

Interview by owners with Bob Pine, July 2007.

Interview by owners with David Sears, The Wingfield-Sears Group, Inc., July 2007.

Interview by owners with Mickey Sheppard, Morris Architects, July 2007.

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Koush, Ben, *Booming Houston and the Modern House: The Residential Architecture of Neihaus and Taylor, 1955-1960* (Houston: Houston Mod), 2006.

University of Denver, Office of Registrar, Transcript (Crockett).

Wiegman, John. *His Story: A Personal History of Morris Architects*, 2001.

### 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 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); |
| <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);  |
| <input 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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(3); |
| <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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(4);   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);                                    |

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- (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 Kropp-Crickmer House at 12923 Memorial Drive.

