

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Davies-Falk House

OWNER: Jerry L. Harper

APPLICANT: Same as owner

LOCATION: 2003 Decatur Street – Old Sixth Ward Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: III

HPO FILE NO.: 07PL37

DATE ACCEPTED: Sept-19-06

HAHC HEARING DATE: Jan-24-07

P.C. MEETING DATE: Feb-01-07

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 7, Block 417, W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic one-story, wood-frame residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Davies-Falk House is a late Victorian “L” shaped cottage constructed in 1897. The home was built for Annie E. Davies by August Lebrun Metcalf, a notable Houston builder, who later constructed many houses in the fashionable Westmoreland neighborhood. The home represents one of Metcalf’s earliest works in Houston. The property was sold in 1909 after the death of Mrs. Davies. The Davies heirs sold it to Benjamin Riesner, notable Houston businessman, who purchased the property as an investment and consequently sold it to Emil and Rosa Falk in 1910. Emil Falk and his wife Rosa resided in the home until their deaths in the 1950s, but their daughter Adela, lived there until her death in 1987. The home was purchased by the present owner in 1988 and subsequently restored. The property qualifies for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation under criteria 1, 4, and 6, and the house was constructed before 1905.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Davies-Falk House at 2003 Decatur Street is located within the boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 23, 1978 and was designated as a city historic district by City Council on June 25, 1998. The home is a one-story, wood frame cottage constructed in 1897 for Annie E. Davies. The house was constructed next door to her homestead at 2007 Decatur as an income producing property. Both the house at 2003 Decatur and the Davies homestead, located next door at 2007 Decatur, were situated on land purchased by James and Annie Davies prior to 1890.

James B. Davies was a native of England born in 1841. His wife Annie, nee Annie Aurand, was a Pennsylvania native born in 1844. The couple was married in Pennsylvania and had a son, Harry B. Davies, born circa 1863. The Davies family moved to Harris County prior to 1880 as evidenced by their enumeration in the 1880 U.S. census of Harris County, Texas. At that time, Davies’ occupation was given as “creosote works”. James Davies was later listed in City directories as the superintendent of the Southern Pacific Railway Company’s Creosote Works. Creosote is used as a wood preservative on railroad ties, telephone poles, and other utilitarian items made of wood that are subjected to extreme conditions. In his later years, Davies’ occupation was given simply as “machinist.” Their son Harry Davies’ occupation was also listed as “machinist.” Harry resided with them until the year of James Davies’ death in 1896. There is no record of Harry Davies after 1896.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

The property, which is located at the southwest corner of Decatur and White Streets, was originally a 95' wide by 100' double lot on which the Davies family lived prior to 1890. In 1890 the Davies' address was given simply as 99 Decatur between Henderson and White. The Davies' home was renumbered 2007 Decatur in 1894. The Davies house at 2007 Decatur was situated to the far western edge of the property, which left ample room for another house on the same lot. An 1896 Sanborn fire Insurance Company map depicts a one-story wood frame house with a full-width front porch constructed to the far western edge of the Davies' property. This is the same house used as their residence

In 1897, the year after her husband's death, Annie had a new house constructed next to hers at 2003 Decatur. By this time the double lot had been divided into two 50' x 100' lots fronting on Decatur, which became known as 2003 and 2007 Decatur. A 1920s bungalow style home now occupies the site of the earlier Davies house at 2007 Decatur.

According to a building contract between Annie Davies and August Lebrun Metcalf, dated August 23, 1897, Metcalf was to furnish the materials and labor to construct a one-story wood frame house on Lot 7 Block 417 in the W.R. Baker Addition, more commonly known as 2003 Decatur. The contract stipulated that the house was to have a shingled roof and a perimeter fence with two gates, presumably to access the property from both the Decatur and White Street sides. Metcalf was also contracted to construct a water closet on the property. A 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map of the property depicts a very small room, with windows, appended to the rear of the home. This room likely represents the bathroom, which is currently located in this approximate area of the house, and is probably a replacement of the freestanding water closet constructed by A. L. Metcalf.

The house at 2003 Decatur represents one of August Lebrun Metcalf's earliest works in Houston as he did not arrive in the city until 1896, the year before the 2003 Decatur house was built. Metcalf was responsible for the construction of many houses located throughout Houston and is most well known for the examples of his work constructed in the Westmoreland neighborhood, which is both a City of Houston Historic District and a National Register Historic District. Metcalf resided in a home located at the corner of Fairview and Whitney Street, in Hyde Park, when he constructed the house for Annie Davies. Later, when Metcalf was active in the construction of homes in the upscale Westmoreland neighborhood, he and his wife lived in a large home at 402 Westmoreland, which also served as the site of club meetings of the South End Travel Study Club.

The house at 2003 Decatur was presumably used as a rental property after its construction. However, the house's first tenants are unknown at this time. The first known tenant to inhabit the house was Thomas P. Cronan, who is known to have resided at that address in 1908. Cronan was a clerk for the Magnolia Brewery Company. The Houston Ice and Brewing Company, whose owners dubbed it the Magnolia Brewery, was founded in 1893 and had its factory and ice-making plant at Fourth and Washington streets on the north side of Buffalo Bayou. The company manufactured ice but was largely recognized for its lager beer that sold under the names "Standard," "Richelieu," "Magnolia Pale," and "Southern Select." Prior to renting the house at 203 Decatur, Thomas Cronan had lived in a house at 807 Trinity with other family members. In 1910 and 1911, Cronan served as Secretary to the City of Houston Fire Commissioner, W.J. Kohlhauff. Cronan moved out of the Decatur house the following year.

Annie Davies died in 1909. After her death, her surviving heirs, consisting of brothers and sisters living in Colorado and Florida, sold the two lots and houses to Benjamin Riesner, a local businessman and 6th Ward resident, for \$2500 in September 1909. On July 30, 1910, Riesner sold the home to Rosa Falk, wife of Emil G. Falk, for \$1500 payable in six installments. The house would serve as the Falk family residence for the next 75 years. Riesner sold the former Davies homestead, located next door at 2007 Decatur, in November 1910 for \$1225.

Emil Falk, a carpenter by trade, was a German immigrant who was born in Berlin. He moved to Houston in 1905. Rosa Falk was born Rosa Seeburger in Swiss Alp, Texas, a small Fayette County community located midway between Schulenburg and La Grange. The Seeburger family is credited as one of the founding families of the Swiss Alp community.

The Davies-Falk House has received notoriety in recent years. The house was featured in a 2004 episode on the Home and Gardens Television program “If Walls Could Talk”, episode number WCT 708. The home was also the subject of an article in the July 2002 “Houston House and Home” magazine, Volume 9 Number 7.

Part of the Fourth Ward until 1876, the Old Sixth Ward Historic District has the largest concentration of Victorian-era buildings in Houston. The majority of the houses standing today were built in the 1870s, 80s, and 90s as modest, one-story frame cottages occupied by a single family. The distinctive Victorian character of these dwellings was enhanced by decorative millwork usually applied to the front porches. As the 20th Century progressed, new housing reflected changes in architectural style. Bungalows were built among the Victorian cottages, but the essential character of the neighborhood did not change. During World War II, many of the houses were converted from single to multi-family dwellings, often owned by absentee landlords. Since achieving recognition as both a nationally and locally designated historic district, the Old Sixth Ward has witnessed the restoration of many homes to single-family occupancy.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Davies-Falk house is a late Victorian “L” shaped wood frame cottage. The home is five bays in width with a prominent projecting, gable ended, square shaped bay to the western side of the front facade. The house is clad in wood clapboard and features two-over-two pane wood sash windows. An applied porch, supported by square wooden columns, is located along the front façade to the east of the projecting bay, which shelters the central entry. The main body of the house is a gable-ended structure oriented east to west on the lot facing Decatur Street. A double hung two-over-two sash wood frame window is located in the east facing gable end and a smaller fixed rectangular wood sash window is located in the front facing pedimented gable. Roof eaves are enclosed and an unadorned, wide, wooden band is located below that follows the perimeter of the house.

During the brief time that the house was not owner occupied, after Adela Falk’s death, it was used as a boarding house with multiple tenants. During this time the house was inhabited by eight tenants, which caused a rapid decline in the home’s overall condition. The current owner purchased the home in 1988. After the purchase, the home underwent a full restoration. The restoration sought to remove inappropriate alterations, while simultaneously conserving historic materials and increasing the useable floor space.

An inappropriate shed roof addition, constructed to the eastern façade of the home facing White Street, was removed at this time. The pre-1907 water closet addition to the rear of the house originally appeared as a small “ell” to the rear of the house. While the water closet was attached, it was only accessible by exiting the rear of the home. The footprint of the home was slightly increased during the post-1988 renovation. Additional square footage was gained with the construction of a small one-story addition to the rear of the home, which brought the rear of the house southward in line with the southernmost wall of the water closet.

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.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

City of Houston Directories 1866-1926, Morrison-Fourmy Publishers.
 Harris County Contract Records 1890-1910.
 Harris County Deed Records 1880-1920.
 Harris County, Texas, U. S. Census records 1880.
 Johnston, Marguerite, Houston, The Unknown city 1836-1946, Texas A&M Press 1991.
 Houghton, Dorothy Knox Howe, Houston's Forgotten Heritage, Landscape, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1914, The Junior League Houston 1991.
 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company maps 1896-1925.

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
<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;
<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;
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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;
<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;
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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;
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			(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;

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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 Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Davies-Falk House at 2003 Decatur Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP
DAVIES-FALK HOUSE
2003 DECATUR STREET
NOT TO SCALE

