

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Ben M. Anderson Home

OWNER: Willowick Grantor Trust (Glen Gonzalez)

APPLICANT: Glen Gonzalez

LOCATION: 3740 Willowick Road – River Oaks

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: VI.a

HPO FILE NO: 08L210

DATE ACCEPTED: Oct-14-08

HAHC HEARING: Nov-13-08

PC HEARING: Nov-20-08

SITE INFORMATION

Tract 8, Block 92, River Oaks Tall Timbers, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes a one-and-a-half story residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The residence at 3740 Willowick Road was designed by John F. Staub, a noted Houston architect, for Ben and Mary Greenwood Anderson. Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood. The house at 3740 Willowick Road has been featured in publications including Howard Barnstone's *The Architecture of John F. Staub* and the *Houston Architectural Guide*. In the Guide, Stephen Fox describes the home as a "Greek revival cottage merged with a classic 50s ranch house." Ben Anderson is best known as the founder of valve manufacturer Anderson Greenwood and Co., and as an aviation enthusiast who donated his collection of aviation memorabilia to the Fondren Library at Rice University. The Ben M. Anderson Home meets Criteria 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

River Oaks

When Will C. Hogg, Mike Hogg, and Hugh Potter began the development of River Oaks in 1923, it was with the intention of making it into a demonstration of the highest standards of modern community planning, a role model for the rest of Houston to follow. Will Hogg's ambitiousness and Hugh Potter's skillful management of River Oaks during its first thirty years made the community known nation-wide as a symbol of Houston. Encouraging home-owners to retain the most talented architects in Houston (as well as several architects of national reputation) to design new houses, they succeeded in creating a large, professionally-administered residential community that demonstrated the potential for beauty in a raw and often raucous city. During the 1920s and 1930s, River Oaks was constantly published in national news, real estate, and design media, highlighting its planning standards, its residential architecture, and its landscape design. Since the 1970s, River Oaks has also been the focus of scholarly analysis, in recognition of its significant contributions to the history of Houston and twentieth-century American elite suburban community development.

The creation of this type of subdivision was unique for Houston in many respects. The subdivision was laid out at what was then the far western edge of Houston. Prior to 1923, the majority of Houston's residential developments had occurred in a tight girdle around the downtown business district. As the sheer size of Houston increased, the demand for more neighborhoods grew along with it. Beginning in

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the early 20th century, the development followed a generally westerly and southwesterly expansion. The newer, more fashionable neighborhoods, such as Westmoreland (1902), Avondale (1907), Montrose (1911), Audubon Place (1906), Cherryhurst (1908), Binz, Southmore (1914), and Courtland Place (1906), developed along the Main Street corridor and to the southwest of downtown. River Oaks, however, was situated at the western city limits far away from other developments.

In addition, the developers broke with convention by laying out an organic pattern of roadways which lent a sense of spaciousness to the neighborhood, which was very different from the traditional Houston neighborhoods that followed a more rigid approach to development. These traditional neighborhoods used street grids which carved the land up into predictable square or rectangular blocks. According to the Texas State History Association's Handbook of Texas:

“River Oaks is 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. A "gentleman's agreement" excluded blacks, Jews, and other minorities. 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 [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 1990s River Oaks was at the geographic center of Houston. The community operated independently for three years, after which it was annexed by the city of Houston.”

The creation and implementation of the River Oaks plan went far beyond the layout of the neighborhood itself. The developers also needed to devise a clever way of drawing prospective buyers away from the more traditional neighborhoods located closer to the downtown business district. This was achieved in two ways. The first was to insure that proper roads connected River Oaks with downtown Houston. The second was to bring the amenities to the residents.

Beginning in 1925, work began in earnest on Buffalo Bayou Drive, which would later become Allen Parkway. Buffalo Bayou Drive was designed by the Kansas City architectural landscape firm of Hare and Hare. The thoroughfare, atypical for its time, was built to provide a reliable route by which River Oaks residents could get to their jobs in downtown Houston while simultaneously providing a pleasant driving experience. The street was designed to follow the meanders of nearby Buffalo Bayou and originated at the north entry to the River Oaks neighborhood. The entry was marked by grand entry gates designed by Houston architect John F. Staub in 1926.

The plan for the scenic drive began more than a decade before its implementation with the Arthur Comey Plan for Houston in 1912. The Comey Plan was a progressive and ambitious plan to guide the future of Houston's development, with quality of life issues as a major component. Parts of the Comey plan called for the creation of scenic drives, considerable park space, and linear parks along the city's bayous. Ultimately, only a small proportion of the components of Comey's plan came to fruition. Among these realized elements were the layout of South Main at Hermann Park with its prominent traffic circles, and Allen Parkway Drive with its adjacent linear park space situated between the drive and Buffalo Bayou.

3740 Willowick Road

The home at 3740 Willowick Road was built in 1957 by John F. Staub for Ben M. Anderson and his wife, Mary Greenwood Anderson. Benjamin Monroe Anderson (1916-2007) was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma as the sixth son of Frank and Burdine Anderson. His father is best known as the co-founder of Anderson-Clayton Co. with his brother and William Lockhart "Will" Clayton. The firm eventually moved its headquarters from Oklahoma to Houston.

Ben Anderson graduated from San Jacinto High School and received a degree in geology from the University of Texas, Austin. In addition, he studied aeronautical engineering at the Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute in California. According to various sources, he was fascinated by aviation and flew model airplanes as a child. In his obituary, his daughter remembered his passion for flying and recalled a small plane that he flew for recreational purposes out of an airport on South Main.

This passion for aviation would stay with him throughout his life. In 1945, he co-founded Anderson Greenwood and Co. with his brother-in-law to design and manufacture aircraft. Beginning in 1947, the company produced five AG-14s, a two seat monoplane with a pusher propeller at the rear. Most interestingly, the Houston Chronicle reported that two of these original AG-14s are still flying.

One of the legacies of Mr. Anderson's passion for flight is his collection of aeronautical material that resides at the Fondren Library at Rice University. The collection is described by Rice as: "...printed materials, such as pilot manuals, mechanic notes, research reports, commercial brochures and other matter. In addition, the collection contains photos, postcards, scrapbooks, unassembled models, and two films....The main focus of the collection is on European aeronautics with British flight the main focus within that, although aeronautics within the United States is also well represented. Materials related to the two World Wars and passenger flight are also represented...Significant or unusual items include a 1784 pronouncement by the Parisian police ballooning over Paris and the photographs and printed materials related to the early days of heavier-than-air flight prior to 1918....The strengths of the collection include a focus on the early days of flight including lighter-than-aircraft and the advent of airplanes. There are numerous photos and printed materials prior to 1918."

Unfortunately, war interrupted Mr. Anderson's plans for the manufacture of aircraft. At this point, the company changed its focus and began designing valves including the first line of soft-seated precision safety relief valves, which were widely used in a variety of industries. In 1986, Keystone International acquired Anderson Greenwood and Co., and Mr. Anderson retired.

John Staub

According to the Handbook of Texas Online, John Staub (1892-1981) began his architectural practice in New York in 1916. In 1921, he came to Houston to supervise a project in the Shadyside neighborhood, and went on to establish his own practice in the City in 1923. Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood. His first independent commission in Houston was the exclusive River Oaks Country Club. He was then retained by the Hogg brothers, Will and Mike, to design two model homes for the developing River Oaks subdivision. As his career progressed, he was tapped as primary architect (with Birdsall Briscoe named associate architect) to design Bayou Bend, the home of Ima Hogg. Between 1924 and 1958, he designed thirty-one houses in River Oaks, in addition to making designs for homes that were never built, as well as designing renovations and extensions for existing homes. Outside of River Oaks, Staub homes from this period were built in Broadacres, Courtlandt Place, and the Fort Worth neighborhood of River Crest. Additional Staub homes may be found in Beaumont, Dallas, and Memphis, Tennessee, some of which are open to the public as museums.

According to Howard Barnstone's book, *The Architecture of John F. Staub*, some of the River Oaks homes designed by Staub include:

- House for Country Club Estates, 3374 Chevy Chase, 1924
- Joseph H. Chew House, 3335 Inwood, 1925
- House for Country Club Estates, 3260 Chevy Chase, 1925
- Kemberton Dean House, 1912 Bellmeade, 1925 (*City of Houston Landmark*)
- John F. Staub House, 3511 Del Monte, 1925
- Hubert B. Finch House, 3407 Inwood, 1926
- Bayou Bend for Ima Hogg, 2940 Lazy Lane, 1926
- Judge Frederick C. Proctor Home, 2950 Lazy Lane, 1926 (as associate to Birdsall Briscoe), Demolished.
- Harry C. Hanszen House, 2955 Lazy Lane, 1930
- John Sweeney Mellinger House, 3452 Del Monte, 1930
- Wallace E. Pratt House, 2990 Lazy Lane, 1931, Demolished.
- George A. Hill, Jr. House, 1604 Kirby Drive, 1931
- Robert J. Neal House, 2960 Lazy Lane, 1931 (*City of Houston Landmark*)
- Hugh Roy Cullen House, 1620 River Oaks Boulevard, 1933
- David D. Bruton House, 2923 Inwood Drive, 1933
- Clarence M. Frost House, 2110 River Oaks Boulevard, 1933
- Ravenna for Stephen P. Farish, 2995 Lazy Lane, 1934
- William J. Crabb House, 2416 Pine Valley Drive, 1935, Demolished.
- Robert Bowles House, 3015 Inwood Drive, 1935
- George S. Heyer Home, 2909 Inwood Drive, 1935
- Oak Shadows for Ray L. Dudley, 3371 Chevy Chase, 1936
- Tom Scurry House, 1912 Larchmont, 1936
- James L. Britton House, 1824 Larchmont, 1936
- Robert D. Strauss House, 1814 Larchmont, 1937
- John M. Jennings House, 2212 Troon Road, 1937
- Dan J. Harrison House, 2975 Lazy Lane, 1938

- Claud B. Hamill House, 2124 River Oaks Boulevard, 1938
- Edward H. Andrews House, 3637 Inwood Drive, 1939, demolished
- Rienzi for Mr. and Mrs. Harris Masterson, III, 1406 Kirby Drive, 1952 (S,R&H)
- House for Mr. and Mrs. George A. Peterkin, Senior, 2005 Claremont, 1957 (S,R&H)

In addition to residential work, Staub designed the parish house of Palmer Memorial Church, the Junior League Building, and the Bayou Club in Houston. His firm designed buildings for the campuses of the University of Texas, Rice University, University of Houston, and the Texas Medical Center. He was also the primary architect on the John Reagan High School project. Staub, Rather, and Howze also consulted with Jim Goodwin of Pierce and Pierce in a new building and planetarium for the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Staub home located at 3740 Willowick Road is situated on a 2.5 acre wooded lot in the Tall Timbers section of River Oaks. *The Architecture of John F. Staub* has an extensive description of the home that is quoted below:

Staub designed this house in 1956 for Ben M. Anderson and his wife, Mary Greenwood Anderson. It is notable for its reserve, particularly in a neighborhood of more assertive houses, built after World War II. Immediate company includes a rustic New England saltbox cum woodsy modern; a French Renaissance villa, outfitted for the automated twentieth-century family; and another 'noble cottage', fretted with every elegant detail of Wren's classicism in an array of colors and finishes. By contrast, Anderson maintains a simple dignity and an unostentatious formality.

On the entrance elevation, not even a dormer interrupts the serene horizontal composition of the light brown brick wall and the shingled roof. A central door is flanked by oversize shuttered windows. Along the frieze zone, five grilled ventilator windows meter the fenestration below and modulate the vertical transition into cornice and roof. Although there are no pilasters, pediments, or porticoes, the effect is definitely that of a humble Greek revival building. Flanking wings and splayed retaining walls define the spacious forecourt and suggest something richer lying within. A Doric portico on the north side of the house provides elegant outdoor living space and recalls the high Greek revival of the antebellum South. Matched sweeping stairs with iron railings, fashioned after a Tuscaloosa precedent, descend to the lawn.

Staub regarded front and rear in an unconventional manner: in his usage, one often enters through the back of the house. Space climaxes in major rooms at the front, facing a private garden area. This formula operates in the majority of his later designs. But, given the southern access and northern-sloping nature of the site (and the factor of air conditioning), this formula is reversed in Anderson, with living rooms facing a northerly garden. Another divergence from established precedent is the combination kitchen-family room, an arrangement which Mary Anderson requested. As in other post-World War II Staub houses, both traditional and contemporary, less formally structured living patterns manifested their effects on domestic planning.

As mentioned above, the home was owned by Ben M. Anderson and his wife Mary since its construction. As such, changes to the home over the years have been minimal. In 2008, Glen Gonzalez purchased the home from the estate and intends to complete a restoration that will include updating the bathrooms and kitchen area, and renovating the closet spaces. The proposed changes will not impact the façade of the home.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

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Handbook of Texas Online, "Staub, John Fanz"

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Barnstone, Howard, *The Architecture of John F. Staub: Houston and the South*, University of Texas Press, 1979.

Fox, Stephen, *The Country Houses of John F. Staub*, Texas A&M University Press, 2007.

Fox, Stephen, ed., "Houston Architectural Guide", 2nd edition, American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, 1999.

Houston Chronicle, "Obituary, Anderson, Co-Founder of Industrial Valve Firm," October 3, 2007.

Texas Medical Center, "Remembering Benjamin Monroe Anderson, Nephew of M.D. Anderson" October 15, 2007.

Houston Architectural Survey, Rice University, 1980.

Rice University web site, "Guide to the Benjamin M. Anderson Aeronautical History collection, 1784-1988."

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the 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 | D - does not satisfy | 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; | | |
| <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 checked="" 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; | | |
| <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 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; | | |

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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;
- (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.

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 Ben M. Anderson Home at 3740 Willowick Road.

BEN M. ANDERSON HOME
3740 WILLOWICK ROAD



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SITE LOCATION MAP
BEN M. ANDERSON HOME
3740 WILLOWICK ROAD
NOT TO SCALE

