

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Turnbow-Smith House

OWNERS: Bert and Marian McWhorter

APPLICANTS: Same as Owners

LOCATION: 104 Avondale Street – Avondale East Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IV.c

HPO FILE NO: 08PL55

DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-20-08

HAHC HEARING: Feb-21-08

PC HEARING: Mar-13-08

SITE INFORMATION:

Tracts 2 & 3A, Block 7, Avondale Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, wood frame with brick veneer residence and non-contributing modern detached guest quarters.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Turnbow-Smith House located at 104 Avondale, built in 1917, was originally the residence of William C. Turnbow. Turnbow was an early 20th century oil wildcatter who came to Houston in 1915 and amassed a fortune with his oil company, Gulf Coast Oil, later the Turnbow Oil Co. Turnbow and his company owned and occupied the Paul Building at 1016 Preston, which was renamed the Turnbow Building during his ownership, and later renamed the Republic Building. Beginning in 1930, the house was the home of Bishop Angie Frank Smith, who presided over the Methodist Episcopal Church South for many years and who was instrumental in the construction of St Paul's Methodist Church and in the creation of the Norsworthy hospital, which later became The Methodist Hospital. The two-story Turnbow-Smith House was constructed in the fashionable Prairie style by the Russell Brown Company, a builder of high-end residential projects in Houston's Avondale, Broadacres, Montrose, River Oaks, Rossmoyne, and Westmoreland neighborhoods, as well as in Dallas, San Antonio, and Los Angeles during the early 20th century.

The Turnbow-Smith House is listed as a contributing structure within the Avondale East Historic District, designated by Houston City Council on November 9, 1999, and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Turnbow-Smith House is a contributing structure within the Avondale East Historic District, which was designated by Houston City Council on November 9, 1999, and encompasses the 100 block of Avondale and Stratford streets and the eastern half of the 200 block of Stratford Street. The original Avondale plat of 1907-1908 encompassed the 100-300 blocks of Hathaway (now Westheimer Road), Avondale, and Stratford. A 1912 expansion to the original neighborhood extended the neighborhood an additional four blocks from Taft Street west to Crocker Street. The western portion of Avondale was designated as the Avondale West Historic District of the City of Houston on October 10, 2007.

The two and one-half story brick veneered home was constructed in 1916-1917 for oil and transportation magnate, William C. Turnbow. Turnbow was born in Red River Parish, Louisiana, in March 1879. He was one of many newcomers drawn to southeast Texas in the early 20th century by

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the booming oil industry after the discovery of oil at Spindletop, Goose Creek, and other nearby oil fields. Many of Houston's wealthy oil men settled in the fashionable new Avondale subdivision, only minutes away from the downtown business district and in close proximity to other fashionable subdivisions like Courtlandt Place, developed in 1907, and Westmoreland, developed in 1905.(1) Known as streetcar suburbs, these early suburban neighborhoods were linked with downtown Houston by the Montrose and South End lines of the Houston Electric Railway Company. Many of the residents of Avondale, however, had the means to afford early automobiles.(2)

William Turnbow came to Houston in 1915 and was at that time the President of Gulf Coast Oil Company, Federal Motors Company, and Star Transportation Company. He moved to the Avondale neighborhood in 1916-1917, where he first occupied the eclectic neoclassical home at 203 Stratford, also within the Avondale East Historic District. His future home, still under construction in 1917, was listed as vacant at that time. Turnbow and his wife Julia moved into the newly completed home at 104 Avondale in late 1917.

Between 1918 and 1924, William Turnbow embarked on several new business ventures, including Consolidated Motors Company, cattle, land, and oil.(1) In 1920, he sold his stake in Gulf Coast Oil and started the Turnbow Oil Corporation, where he was President. Robert Crews Duff, East Texas Railroad magnate, former member of the Texas House of Representatives, and noted Houston socialite, was Vice President of the company. The alignment between Turnbow, who had significant oil field holdings, and R. C. Duff, with his railroad holdings in East Texas to ship the oil, was a perfect match.

Turnbow Oil Corporation offices were headquartered on the 7th floor of the Turnbow Building located at 1016 Preston, located at the corner of Fannin Street, and more commonly known as the Paul or Republic Building (COH Landmark, N.R.). (3) The building was designed by the architectural firms of Buchanan & Gilder and Sanguinet & Staats and was completed in 1907.

Turnbow Oil Corporation assumed the payments of the Paul Building from Hoffman Oil and Refining Company in January 1920. The outstanding note of \$330,000 plus 8% interest was to be repaid in 37 monthly payments. (4) After the transfer of title in 1920, the building was renamed the Turnbow Building, and is featured in a full page advertisement in the 1921 Houston City Directory.

After 1924, William Turnbow was still working in the building, but the building had been renamed the Republic Building, and it is assumed that Turnbow had sold the building. In 1925, Turnbow moved to a rented flat at 803 Alabama in the Lockhart Connor Barziza subdivision and was simply listed as an oil operator. After 1925, there is no address listed for William Turnbow in Houston. In August 1934, Turnbow reappeared in Longview, Texas. According to the Texas Adjutant General's records, 55 year old Turnbow, who listed his occupation as an 'oil operator,' enlisted as a Texas Special Ranger. In the early 1930s, the Texas Rangers were charged with the task of cleaning up Texas' oil boom towns. It is probably not a coincidence that W. C. Turnbow would have volunteered for a position with the Rangers with much at stake in the local oil business. In 1933, the Texas Rangers supported gubernatorial hopeful Ross Sterling, a former Avondale resident, over Miriam "Ma" Ferguson. Ferguson carried the election that year and retaliated by severely cutting the Rangers' numbers.

The following five years saw two different inhabitants of the house at 104 Avondale. From 1925 until 1927, oilman Harry H. Lee and wife Sylvia occupied the home, followed in quick succession by Abe Wagner, partner in the law firm of Love, Wagner & Wagner.

Beginning in 1930, Angie Frank Smith (1889-1962), Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church South (1) resided in the home at 104 Avondale for four years. Smith, a Southern Methodist University graduate and holder of two honorary degrees from the same institution, also attended Divinity School

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at Vanderbilt University. Smith was responsible for the creation of the church that ultimately became Dallas' Highland Park Methodist Church.

In 1922, Angie Frank Smith was appointed to Houston's First Methodist Church. It was at this church that Smith was responsible for the church's strong opposition to the Ku Klux Klan at a time when the Klan was gaining in strength. He was ordained a bishop in 1930 and acted as resident bishop for the Houston area for over 25 years. Smith was responsible for planning the new St. Paul's Methodist Church to be located at 5501 Main Street at Bissonnet. Bishop Smith entrusted his friend Jesse H. Jones as head of the building committee.(5) Houston architect Alfred C. Finn was hired for the project.

Bishop Smith presided over the Methodist conferences which covered the southwest, central, north, and the Rio Grande areas of Texas. Smith was also a trustee of The Methodist Hospital and of Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas.(6) Bessie Smith, wife of Angie Frank Smith, was a founding member of the Bluebird Circle in 1923. The organization, which still exists today, volunteered to provide social welfare to single mothers and their children. The Bluebird Circle would later provide a convalescent home for crippled children adjacent to the Norsworthy Hospital on Rosalie Street in Midtown.

Bishop Angie Frank Smith helped broker the deal between the Norsworthy Hospital and the Texas Methodist Conference that ultimately led to the creation of The Methodist Hospital. Today, The Methodist Hospital is one of the nation's largest private non-profit hospitals with over one billion dollars in annual patient revenues and more than \$260 billion in charitable services.(7) Angie Frank Smith, Jr., became a managing partner with the Houston law firm of Vinson and Elkins and was the namesake for the Angie Frank Smith, Jr., library at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas.

The house was constructed by the Russell Brown Company of Dallas/Houston. Albert Nelms, Jr., business partner of the Inman Nelms and Company cotton merchants, and son of Albert Nelms, Sr., a powerful figure in Houston's cotton industry, contracted with Russell Brown to construct the home at 104 Avondale. It was adjacent to Nelms' his own home at 100 Avondale. The home of Nelms was a high-raised, Craftsman bungalow (demolished). Nelms immediately sold the completed home at 104 Avondale to William Turnbow in July 1917 for \$25,000. The following excerpt is taken from the historic landmark report for the Maurice and Virginia Brown Angly House at 2514 Brentwood Drive in River Oaks.

“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 in 1916, San Antonio in 1922, and Los Angeles in 1923. The firm specialized in house design and construction, but also designed several commercial buildings in Houston in the 1920s and 1930s, such as the first Jefferson Davis Hospital and the Schlumberger Building, as well as the six-story Guaranty State Bank and Simpson Office Building in Ardmore, Oklahoma in 1917.

The Russell Brown Company constructed numerous houses in the Avondale, Westmoreland, Montrose, Boulevard Oaks, and River Oaks neighborhoods in Houston and in 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, N.R.). Notable houses the company built outside of Houston include the Herbert L. Kokernot House in Monte Vista in San Antonio (1928); the O. L. Seagraves House at the Mo Ranch near Hunt, Texas (1929); the

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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, the River Oaks Corporation hired one of Russell Brown's architects, Charles Oliver, as in-house architect in 1926. "

Avondale was one of several upscale "suburban" neighborhoods developed during the first quarter of the 20th century, which included Audubon Place, Courtlandt Place, James Bute Addition, Montrose, and Westmoreland. This area attracted Houston's business and social elite more than a decade before the creation of River Oaks. Avondale was first platted in 1907 and derived its name from a variation on the name of William Shakespeare's hometown in England, Stratford-upon-Avon. According to an Art Nouveau-style ad in the May 25, 1907, Houston Daily Post newspaper, the name Avondale was chosen from a publicly advertised naming contest. Nine contestants tied for the \$25 prize, which was increased to \$27 so that the nine winners could split the money evenly. The three major thoroughfares in Avondale were named Avondale, Stratford, and Hathaway. Avondale offered many attractive perks to wealthy Houstonians. All unsightly utility lines and garbage bins were accessed from the alleyways behind every home. The concrete curbs and sidewalks were tinted a pleasing shade of pink so as not to strain the eye in the afternoon sun, and streets were paved with oyster shell. Furthermore, no businesses, boarding houses, or structures costing less than \$5,000 were allowed within the neighborhood. The developers touted it as a "first class neighborhood." The streets were landscaped with a variety of oaks, palms, and camphor trees planted by the fledgling Teas Nursery. Today, the area is an eclectic mix of old and new as well as residential and commercial uses.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Turnbow-Smith House is a two story raised frame home with tan brick veneer, basement and finished attic. The house is designed in accordance with many of the principles of the Prairie School of architecture, popularized by Frank Lloyd Wright. Its horizontal concrete banding accents the horizontality of the low eccentric hipped roof. The roof, which features dormers on four sides, was once covered with green glazed terracotta roof tiles that were removed prior to 1989. The wide overhanging roof eaves are supported by decorative, but structural, scroll eave brackets which were an integral part of the roof system that once supported the added weight of clay roof tiles.

The building's primary, north façade is characterized by a broad front porch with low hipped roof applied to the front of the building and which is supported by brick columns and eave brackets identical to those which support the main roof. The front entry door is executed in quarter sawn oak with divided beveled glass which is surrounded by single pane beveled glass transom and sidelights. The porch features a brick stoop and base topped by a square wood stick balustrade and wood cap rail. A two-story sunroom wing is located at the easternmost portion of the building and features stucco and simulated half timbering.

The majority of the windows installed on the exterior of the home are double-hung, wood-sash windows with multi-lite uppers over a single-lite lower-sash. Exceptions to these window types can be found in the dormer windows and the first and second-story sunroom windows. These windows are multi-paned, wood-sash casement windows capped by fixed multi-pane transom lights. The William L. Connelly House (COH Landmark, 2006) at 218 Avondale, which is also a Russell Brown house, is similar in design.

An attached porte-cochere extends from the first floor of the home's western elevation. It features a low-pitched hipped roof similar to that of the front porch. A secondary doorway leads from the porte-

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cochere into a small foyer at ground level on the home's western facade. From the small interior foyer, access may be gained either to the basement, to a small half bath, or up a short flight of stairs to the first floor of the home. The entry from the porte-cochere to the main body of the house allowed for coal and ice deliveries via a secondary stair to either the kitchen or to the basement where a large coal furnace provided centralized heating throughout the home.

Interior features of the home include many trademarks of Russell Brown buildings. Russell Brown homes of the period used plumbing fixtures made by the Standard Manufacturing Co., and Houston's Peden Iron and Steel furnished the hardware. Hartwell Iron works, another Houston company, furnished the fittings for the coal furnaces, while Brown-Woods Electric Co. furnished the lighting fixtures.(8) All floors and trim in public rooms were executed in quarter-sawn oak while private rooms, such as sleeping chambers, servants stairs, and upstairs hallways, utilize pine as the primary wood. A servant's buzzer, mounted in the center of the dining room floor, was another trademark of Russell Brown homes both big and small.

The home was rescued from demolition by the McWhorter family in 1989 after having been abandoned for approximately five years. The home was restored using surviving architectural fabric and documentation from the circa 1919 Russell Brown prospectus titled "Modern Homes," which features an exterior photograph and floor plan drawings of the home. The home continues to serve as a single family residence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Morrison-Fourmy Houston City Directories, 1910-1945.
2. Houston Electric: The Street Railways of Houston, Texas, Steven M. Baron, 1996.
3. Houston's Forgotten Heritage: Landscape, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1910, Houghton, Scardino, Blackburn, and Howe, 1991.
4. Harris County Deed Records, 1911-1924.
5. Houston The Unknown City 1836-1946, Marguerite Johnston, 1991.
6. "Angie Frank Smith," The Handbook of Texas Online article, Norman W. Spellman.
7. The Methodist Hospital online, www.methodisthealth.com.
8. "Modern Homes," the Russell Brown Co., Dallas-Houston.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, and edited by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

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S NA

S - satisfies NA - not applicable

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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);
- (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).

AND

- (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).

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

OR

- The property is 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 (Sec. 33-229(a)(3);

OR

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4).

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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 and Protected Landmark Designation of the Turnbow- Smith House at 104 Avondale Street.

SITE LOCATION MAP
TURNBOW-SMITH HOUSE
104 AVONDALE STREET
NOT TO SCALE

