

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Henderson-Scurlock House
OWNER: Laura Sue Henderson McMurrey
APPLICANT: Same
LOCATION: 3663 Del Monte Drive – River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IV.c
HPO FILE NO: 09L216
DATE ACCEPTED: May-01-09
HAHC HEARING: May-21-09
PC HEARING: May-28-09

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 3, Block 76, River Oaks Section 9, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Henderson-Scurlock House, located at 3663 Del Monte Drive, was built in 1941 for Mr. and Mrs. Hugh G. Henderson. The house was designed by the notable Houston architect, Harry D. Payne, and was built by local builder, C. C. Rouse. Payne served as an architect for Houston Independent School District and several other local school districts, and designed many local school buildings, including River Oaks Elementary and Edgar Allen Poe Elementary schools and Robertson Stadium at the University of Houston.

In 1946, the house was purchased by Eddy and Elizabeth Scurlock. Eddy Clark Scurlock amassed a considerable fortune in the oil business, much of which the Scurlocks donated to further health and education causes. Many of their financial gifts flowed through the Scurlock Foundation, which was founded in 1958. The 21-story Scurlock Tower in the Texas Medical Center was named in honor of the support given by the Scurlocks.

The two-story brick Henderson-Scurlock house exhibits characteristics of the Colonial Revival style. Its most prominent features are two colossal Corinthian columns, a pedimented entry, and a second floor balconette featuring wrought iron railing.

The Henderson-Scurlock House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Henderson-Scurlock House at 3663 Del Monte Drive was built in 1941 for Mr. and Mrs. Hugh G. Henderson. C. C. Rouse was awarded \$15,000 to build the house which was designed by notable Houston architect, Harry D. Payne. According to the *Houston Post*, the estimated sale price of the house was approximately \$15,000.

An article in the *River Oaks Magazine* described the house as:

“...a beautiful version of the Southern Colonial style. The architect’s interpretation in this instance took a more classical turn than is usual with this type and the result is pleasing and interesting. A deep rosy-red brick is used, white trim is used lavishly in the window framings, the broad entrance feature, the columns and pediment and the wrought iron railings. The house sits back in a fine wooded lot...”

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Hugh Henderson owned the Hugh G. Henderson Company, which manufactured and sold laundry machinery. Mr. and Mrs. Henderson resided in the house for approximately five years. In 1946, the house was purchased by Eddy and Elizabeth Scurlock. The Scurlocks owned the house for 18 years, until 1964, when the current owner, Sue McMurrey, purchased the house.

Eddy Clark Scurlock

Eddy Clark Scurlock was described by the *Houston Chronicle* as a “philanthropist” and “oil industry giant.” He was born in 1905 in Newton, Texas, and was raised in Tenaha, East Texas. In 1922, he earned a high school diploma and acquired a job as a kitchen assistant on a Standard Oil pipeline construction site. In 1926, he moved to Houston and worked in the sales department of Magnolia Oil. Later, he purchased his own gas service station at the corner of Louisiana and Webster. Subsequent jobs included commission agent for Humble Oil (Seguin) and oil broker for Cooper Petroleum, where he was named manager of the Minneapolis office in 1933. In 1936, Scurlock formed Scurlock Oil Company, a petroleum product marketing firm. The firm grew dramatically over the years and was sold in 1982 to Ashland Oil. As a second venture, in 1946, Scurlock founded Eddy Refining Company. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the firm became an “important refiner of independent gasolines and, through an affiliated company, a distributor and retailer.”

Eddy and Elizabeth Scurlock left a significant imprint on Houston. Upon his death, the *Houston Chronicle* stated, “Eddy Scurlock made a fortune in the oil business. That’s not his life story, though. Eddy Scurlock also gave away a fortune to further health and education.” Many of his gifts flowed through the Scurlock Foundation, which was founded thirty years before his death. Most notable is the 21-story building located at 6500 Fannin in the Texas Medical Center named Scurlock Tower in honor of the support given by the couple. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the Scurlocks’ main charities included “schools, medical and health institutions, with an emphasis on churches, schools and hospitals associated with the Methodist Church.” In particular, they provided funding for a large number of buildings at Lon Morris College, a training school for Methodist ministers, in Jacksonville, Texas, and Holly Hall Christian Retirement Community in Houston. On January 17, 1988, Eddy Scurlock passed away in Methodist Hospital at the age of 83.

Harry Daniel Payne

Harry Daniel Payne, the architect of the Henderson-Scurlock House, was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1891 and earned a degree in architecture from Washington University of St. Louis. He served in World War I after training at Fort Sheridan Officers Training School. He began his armed forces career as a commissioned 1st Lieutenant and worked his way up to Captain through a battlefield promotion.

Payne came to Houston around 1925, at the age of 35, from the office of the St. Louis architect William B. Ittner, the foremost school design expert in the Midwest. Payne served as architect for the Houston Independent School District from 1927, and was responsible for the design of numerous school buildings, including River Oaks Elementary and Edgar Allen Poe Elementary schools. Payne also designed Robertson Stadium on the University of Houston campus, which was built in 1941-42 as the Houston Public School Stadium, a joint project between HISD and

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the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal agency created by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

Among his notable domestic works is the William P. Hobby house in Braeswood (1928). His architectural commissions in Texas, however, concentrated on schools, and during his career, he served as a consultant to Anahuac ISD, Beaumont ISD, Corpus Christi ISD, Houston ISD, and Huntsville ISD.

Payne was active in the American Institute of Architects and received the Edward C. Kemper Award in 1962. According to AIA, the award is “conferred by the national Board of Directors on an architect member who has contributed significantly to the profession through service to the American Institute of Architects.”

Some of the buildings designed by Harry D. Payne are listed below:

- Robert E. Lee High School, Baytown, 1928.
- Eastwood Elementary (Dora Lantrip Elementary), 1927 addition, with James Ruskin Bailey.
- Edgar Allen Poe Elementary School, 1929.
- River Oaks Elementary School, 1929.
- Charles Bender High School, Humble, c. 1929.
- Eugene Field Elementary School, 1920s.
- E. W. Griffey House, 2218 Troon Road, 1930-31.
- H. F. Estill House, 1614 University Avenue, Huntsville, 1931.
- 2420 Brentwood Drive, 1936.
- Mirabeau B. Lamar High School, 1937, with John F. Staub, Kenneth Franzheim, Louis A. Glover, and Lamar Q. Cato.
- Sam Houston Memorial Museum, Huntsville, 1937.
- Robertson Stadium, University of Houston, 1941-42.
- Phyllis Wheatley High School, 1949.
- Deer Park School Center

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 house-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,

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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 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 housesites, 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 house 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 house 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

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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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The two-story brick Henderson-Scurlock House exhibits characteristics of the Colonial Revival style. Its most prominent features are two colossal Corinthian columns, a pediment entry, and a second floor balconette featuring wrought iron railing. The house is of frame construction with brick veneer and features a symmetrical, rectangular plan. The front façade features a central entrance and four symmetrically balanced double hung windows flanked by shutters. A full-height entry with triangular pediment features an oval leaded window. The central entrance is contained within a frame enclosing a leaded glass transom and six-paneled wood door. Above the doorway, on the second floor, is a balconette flanked by an arrow-patterned iron railing. A central, fixed Palladian window looks out onto this balconette. The foundation is brick and the roof is of wood shingles. The house also features a brick fireplace on the gable wall. Below the two first-story windows are two rows of patterned brick.

The current owner purchased the house in 1964. The owner hired architect Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., to remodel and slightly expand the house. These changes included removing the existing glass front door and revising the door head to include a glass transom, extending a "living porch" and adding paneling to the walls, combining the breakfast room with the kitchen, and other interior changes. With the exception of the front door replacement and addition of the transom, the façade has not changed from its original 1941 appearance.

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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 Henderson-Scurlock House at 3663 Del Monte Drive.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
HENDERSON-SCURLOCK HOUSE
3663 DEL MONTE DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

