

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Scientific Barbershop
OWNER: Bernadette Presley
APPLICANT: Courtney Tardy, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance
LOCATION: 4610 Market Street – Fifth Ward
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: VI.b
HPO FILE NO: 09L220
DATE ACCEPTED: Sep-8-09
HAHC HEARING: Oct-22-09
PC HEARING: Oct-29-09

SITE INFORMATION: East 20 feet of Lot 1, Block 7, Pinecrest Court Section 2, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story wood frame building, clad with asbestos siding.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Scientific Barbershop, located at 4610 Market Street, has been a Fifth Ward institution since the 1940s. Established circa 1944 by Willia “Bill” Glenn Scott, a female barber, Scientific Barbershop has served the Fifth Ward community through two generations of family ownership. The shop got its name because Ms. Scott had been trained at a barber college and thus understood the ‘science’ of barbering. The name is also reminiscent of the history of the profession, as in earlier times, barbers not only cut hair, but also performed surgery and dentistry. The barber pole with its red and white spiral indicates the two crafts - surgery in red and barbering in white.

Barbershops have long played a central role in black communities. In Fifth Ward, Scientific Barbershop functions as a neighborhood center in addition to barber shop – a place for community residents, businessman, politicians, educators, doctors, lawyers and preachers to gather, exchange information, and debate the topics of the day. Over the years, Scientific Barbershop has attracted many patrons from Houston’s African-American political leadership, such as Mickey Leland, El Franco Lee, Alfred Calloway, Gene Locke, and Harold Dutton. Scientific Barbershop has been such an integral part of the neighborhood’s community life that it is popularly known as the “City Hall of the Fifth Ward.”

Willia Scott, the original proprietor of Scientific Barbershop, was a female in a male-dominated field. There were very few women barbers at the time the shop was established, and Ms. Scott and her older sister, Nannie Glenn, were the first female barbers in the Fifth Ward. Nannie Glenn was also an instructor at Tyler Barber College in Houston, which trained most of the African-American barbers in the 1930s and 1940s. Over the years, Ms. Scott trained and employed both male and female barbers in her shop. Today, Scientific Barbershop is still in the family - owned and operated by Ms. Scott’s daughter, Bernadette Presley.

The building at 4610 Market Street, built in 1949, is a two-story wood frame vernacular building with wood and asbestos siding. The barbershop is located on the first floor and a residence is on the second floor. The building is in good condition and has experienced minimal changes over the years.

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Scientific Barbershop is a visible reminder of the history and heritage of Houston's Fifth Ward and the ethnic diversity of the City. It is also noteworthy for having been a woman-owned family business for 65 years. The Scientific Barbershop meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

FIFTH WARD

In 1840, the town was divided into four wards, with each ward electing two representatives to the municipal government. The First Ward was north of Congress and west of Main; the Second Ward was north of Congress and east of Main; the Third Ward was south of Congress and east of Main, and the Fourth Ward was south of Congress and west of Main. After the Civil War, two more wards, the Fifth Ward and Sixth Ward, were added as the city spread north of Buffalo Bayou. These wards ceased to exist as political subdivisions in 1912, but the terms are still used today to denote portions of the original wards.

The area today known as Fifth Ward is bounded by Buffalo Bayou on the south, Lockwood Drive on the east, Liberty Road on the north, and Jensen Drive on the west. This area was sparsely inhabited before the Civil War. It was subsequently settled by freedmen and became known as the Fifth Ward in 1866, when an alderman was elected to represent the community in the Houston city government. At the time, half the population was black and half was white. By 1870, the population of the ward comprised 561 white and 578 black residents. Two schools, one black and one white, corresponded to the roughly equal segments of the ward's population in 1876. Mount Vernon United Methodist Church, founded in 1865 by former slave, Rev. Toby Gregg, is the oldest institution in Fifth Ward. Five other churches are over 100 years old: Pleasant Grove Baptist, Mount Pleasant Baptist, Sloan Memorial United Methodist, Payne Chapel Methodist, and First Shiloh Baptist.

The Fifth Ward was also the site of a saloon named for Carry Nation which, after considerable damage resulting from a dispute with the owner over the name, was subsequently known as the "Carnation." In the 1880s, Fifth Ward enjoyed a boom following the construction of repair shops for the newly built Southern Pacific Railroad. Growth was interrupted by a fire in 1891 at the Phoenix Lumber Mill and another in 1912 that burned over 40 blocks - 119 houses, 116 boxcars, nine oil tanks, thirteen plants, and St. Patrick's Catholic Church and School. The 1912 Fifth Ward fire still ranks as the largest in Houston's history.

Eventually, the Fifth Ward population became predominantly black. At Frenchtown, a four-square-block neighborhood in Fifth Ward, 500 blacks of French and Spanish descent from Louisiana organized a community in 1922. Black-owned businesses, including a pharmacy, a dentist's office, an undertaking parlor, a theater, and several barbershops operated on Lyons Avenue after 1900. The number of black-owned businesses in Fifth Ward grew to forty by 1925. Working-class blacks were primarily employed within walking distance of the ward; many worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad or at the Houston Ship Channel. Others commuted across town to work as domestic help for wealthy Houstonians. By 1927, Phillis Wheatley High School in Fifth Ward, with 2,600 students and sixty teachers, was one of the largest black high schools in America. Other new businesses developed in the 1930s, including printing plants, photography studios, and the Club Matinee,

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which came to be known as the Cotton Club of the South. Local businessman Grand Duke Crawford organized the Fifth Ward Civic Club.

Peacock Records, a black-owned recording company, started in Fifth Ward, as did C. F. Smith Electric Company, one of the state's early licensed electrical-contracting companies. Finnigan Park, the second public park for blacks in Houston, opened in the community in the postwar years, and the Julia C. Hester House, a black community center, began service. Nat Q. Henderson, long-time principal of Bruce Elementary School, became known for his leadership in the neighborhood.

With passage of integration laws in the 1960s, many residents left the community seeking wider opportunities. The Fifth Ward is noted for training many prominent athletes. Noted musicians from the ward include Arnett Cobb, Milton Larkin, Illinois Jacquet, and Joe Sample. Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland, members of the United States Congress, both graduated from Wheatley High School. Despite recent decades of decline, attempts are being made to revitalize the neighborhood. Fifth Ward contains a significant number of late 19th century and early 20th century examples of vernacular, Victorian, and Craftsman architecture.

SCIENTIFIC BARBERSHOP

A barber (from the Latin barba, "beard") is someone whose occupation is to cut any type of hair, give shaves, and trim beards. The barber's trade is an ancient one. Razors have been found among relics of the Bronze Age (circa 3500 BC) in Egypt, and barbering was introduced to Rome by the Greek colonies in Sicily in 296 B.C. The barbers of former times were also surgeons and dentists. In addition to haircutting, hairdressing, and shaving, barbers performed surgery, bloodletting and leeching, fire cupping, enemas, and the extraction of teeth. Thus they were called barber surgeons, and they formed their first organization in 1094. The barber pole, red and white in spiral, indicated the two crafts, surgery in red and barbering in white.

In the African-American community, the barbershop contributed significantly to the cultural development of the neighborhood. The barbershop functions as a neighborhood center, a place to gather, exchange information and debate the topics of the day. The Scientific Barbershop maintains such an integral part of community life that it is popularly known as the "City Hall of the Fifth Ward." It first received this moniker by Artice "C-Boy" Vaughan, a reporter and writer for the Forward Times, a black-owned newspaper. In addition to being a community gathering center, the barbershop is also the site of an important coming of age ritual for young boys. According to Bobby Lee, "In the black community, a boy's first haircut is an informal ritual to help initiate and introduce him into adult male maturity."

Established circa 1944, Scientific Barbershop has served the Fifth Ward community through two generations of ownership. The shop got its name because the owner had been trained at a barber college and thus understood the 'science' of barbering. For sixty years, Scientific Barbershop, in the same location at 4610 Market Street in Houston's Fifth Ward, has been a place where anyone could come for services and not feel as though he or she were a stranger. The barbershop evolved into a place where community residents, businessman, politicians, educators, doctors, lawyers and preachers would gather to receive not only a shampoo, haircut, or shave, but also to discuss current events, philosophy of life, and to network with one another.

Scientific Barbershop has attracted patrons from the local, state and national leadership. Scientific Barbershop is important for its connection to numerous Houston African-American leaders,

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including the late former Congressman George “Mickey” Leland; Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee; his brother and community organizer Bob Lee; 2009 Houston mayoral candidate Gene Locke; former Houston Councilmember Alfred Calloway; Wally Henry; and Texas State Representative Harold Dutton. All of these men are past or present customers of the Scientific Barbershop.

The first location for Scientific Barbershop was situated on Market Street, one block away from its current location at 4610 Market Street. In 1949, Willia “Bill” Glenn Scott and her father purchased the building at 4610 Market Street and renovated it into the shop that exists today. Scientific Barbershop is a reminder of the development and heritage of Houston’s Fifth Ward and the ethnic diversity of the City. In examining the Sanborn maps of 1924-1951, during a time when the Fifth Ward was heavily segregated from the other areas of Houston, one can see densely populated and developed blocks. While much of this housing and retail has been demolished or replaced, the Scientific Barbershop remains as a visible reminder of the development of Fifth Ward.

WILLIA “BILL” GLENN SCOTT

The original proprietor of the Scientific Barbershop, Willia “Bill” Glenn Scott, was a female in a male-dominated field. Ms. Scott opened the barbershop circa 1944, and moved it to its present location in 1949. Her daughter, Ms. Bernadette Presley, owns and operates the shop today. Willia Scott’s older sister, Nannie Glenn, was an instructor at Tyler Barber College in Houston. Tyler Barber College trained most of Texas’ African-American barbers during the 1930s and 1940s at its location on Dowling Street, as well as other locations around the state. Ms. Glenn worked for Tyler Barber College’s owner, H. P. Morgan, and traveled throughout Texas opening barber colleges.

Ms. Glenn persuaded her sister, Ms. Scott, who was still attending Wheatley High School, to attend Tyler Barber College and learn the trade. Ms. Scott graduated high school in 1944 and attended Prairie View A&M. She returned to Houston to open up Scientific Barbershop. There were very few female barbers during this time and these two women were the first in the Fifth Ward. Ms. Scott succeeded and thrived in a male-dominated profession. She also trained and employed both male and female barbers in her shop, including Cicola Johnson (now deceased) who later opened a barbershop in Sunnyside. His children still run that shop today.

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

“Vernacular architecture is a term used to categorize methods of construction which use locally available resources and traditions to address local needs. Vernacular architecture tends to evolve over time to reflect the environmental, cultural and historical context in which it exists. It has often been dismissed as crude and unrefined, but also has proponents who highlight its importance in current design.

It can be contrasted against polite architecture which is characterized by stylistic elements of design intentionally incorporated for aesthetic purposes which go beyond a building's functional requirements.

The building knowledge in vernacular architecture is often transported by local traditions and is thus based largely - but not only - upon knowledge achieved by trial and error and handed down through the generations, in contrast to the geometrical and physical calculations that underlie architecture planned by architects. This of course does not prevent architects from using vernacular

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architecture in their designs or from being firmly based in the vernacular architecture of their regions.

Vernacular architecture is influenced by a great range of different aspects of human behavior and environment, leading to differing building forms for almost every different context; even neighboring villages may have subtly different approaches to the construction and use of their dwellings, even if they at first appear the same. Despite these variations, every building is subject to the same laws of physics, and hence will demonstrate significant similarities in structural forms.”

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Scientific Barbershop at 4610 Market Street was built in 1949 and is an excellent example of vernacular commercial architecture. The builder is currently unknown. The building is a two-story vernacular structure with a barber shop located on the first floor and a residence located on the second floor. There is a 561 square foot residence located behind the shop, at the rear of the property. HCAD records list this structure as being built in 1945.

The façade of the Scientific Barbershop is simple and vernacular. The two-story building is of wood frame construction. The first floor façade is clad with a combination of wood and textured asbestos siding; the second floor is clad in asbestos siding. The use of asbestos siding is denoted on the 1951 Sanborn map. Concrete has been poured around the base of the building, but given its date and style, it is likely a pier and beam foundation. A central wooden entry door (a later addition) with nine lights is flanked by metal windows with three vertically oriented lights and two horizontally oriented lights above. The second floor front façade has two small horizontal windows. The building is covered with a gable roof which is hidden behind a false front. The structure is painted a tan color.

The east side of the structure has four windows similar to the ones on the second story of the building. The roof rafter ends are visible. The west side of the building has another metal window similar to the one on the first floor front façade. This window is covered with a plastic overhang for water protection. There is a door to the rear of the façade. Upstairs, there are three windows similar to the ones on the second floor of the front façade.

According to the owner, the building appears as it has since it was occupied by Scientific Barbershop in 1949. It has experienced minimal changes and the integrity of the building is intact dating to 1949. The condition of the building is good.

The information and sources provided by the owner, Bernadette Presley, and by Courtney Tardy, Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Sanborn Map, Volume 3, 1924-1951.

Wikipedia, "Barber" at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barber>.

Wikipedia, "Vernacular Architecture" at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/vernacular_architecture.

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 |
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- (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;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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 Scientific Barbershop at 4610 Market Street.

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EXHIBIT A
SCIENTIFIC BARBERSHOP
4610 MARKET STREET



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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
SCIENTIFIC BARBERSHOP
4610 MARKET STREET
NOT TO SCALE

