

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Holley-Mengden House

OWNERS: Leonard and Susan Teich

APPLICANTS: Same

LOCATION: 2240 Glen Haven Blvd – Old Braeswood

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: II.b

HPO FILE NO: 11L234

DATE ACCEPTED: Mar-02-11

HAHC HEARING: Mar-24-11

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 20, Block 6, Section One, Braeswood Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, brick veneer, single-family residence and two-story brick veneer garage apartment.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation for historic house

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Holley-Mengden House was built circa 1930 in the historic subdivision of ‘Old’ Braeswood. Established in 1928 by Houston developer and financier, George F. Howard, Braeswood was planned as the South End’s version of the exclusive River Oaks, with gently curving streets, lush landscaping, and large lots filled with ‘country’ houses designed in the eclectic architectural styles of the time. The plan for Old Braeswood was designed by Hare and Hare of Kansas City, the nation’s premier landscape firm. The neighborhood was developed in spurts through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s by different developers, with each section of the neighborhood having a distinct character reflecting its era of development.

The two-story brick house at 2240 Glen Haven was built in Braeswood’s earliest section, and its French eclectic style of architecture reflects the eclectic manorial styles in vogue at the time. The earliest residents of the house were Dolores Welder and her first husband, William Crabb. In 1938, the house was purchased by Walter and Eugenia Mengden, who lived in the house until the mid-1950s. Their son, Walter Mengden, Jr., who grew up in the house, went on to serve in the Texas Legislature from 1971-1982. A Republican in an era when most Texas legislators were Democrats, Mengden acquired the nickname ‘Mad Dog’ because of a reputation for opposing almost any bill that was introduced.

If approved, the Holley-Mengden House will become the first designated landmark in Old Braeswood. The Holley-Mengden House meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4 for landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Old Braeswood

Old Braeswood is one of Houston’s historic neighborhoods, bounded by South Main, North Braeswood, Kirby Drive, and Holcombe Blvd. Located within one mile of the Texas Medical Center, Rice University, Rice Village, and the Astrodome complex, and surrounded by some of Houston’s best schools, medical facilities, museums, restaurants, and shopping, Old Braeswood is one of the most convenient neighborhoods in the city.

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Originally planned as a model 1920s garden subdivision, Braeswood was intended to be the South End's response to River Oaks, also developed in the 1920s, with similar gently curving streets, lush landscaping, and large lots filled with 'country' houses designed in the eclectic architectural styles of the time. The subdivision was planned in 1927 and 1928 for banker and developer George F. Howard by Hare and Hare, the Kansas City landscape architects responsible for many garden suburbs across the country, including Houston.

Howard was a lawyer and president of the San Jacinto Trust Company of Houston, a bank he established in 1920 that specialized in financing suburban real estate development. In 1927, Howard purchased 450 acres from John H. Kirby, who had assembled a large amount of land between Bellaire/Holcombe Blvd and Brays Bayou during the 1910s and early 1920s. Strict deed restrictions were drawn up that controlled land use, height, setbacks, building materials, and required all architectural plans to be approved by the Braeswood Corporation.

Between 1928 and 1929, five houses were built by the Braeswood Corporation in Section One of Braeswood (2115 Glenn Haven, 2329 Bluebonnet, 7319 Greenbriar, 2234 Glenn Haven, and 2318 Glenn Haven), and numerous others were built speculatively or by resident owners. All were two-story, brick-faced houses and, with one exception, were designed in a picturesque English manorial style, one of an array of eclectic "period" styles in vogue for American suburban houses of the 1920s. The first of these houses, at 2115 Glenn Haven, was designed by the architect Harry D. Payne; the others were designed by Carl A. Mulvey, whom the corporation designated consulting architect by September 1928. Mulvey had spent two years working in the office of Birdsall P. Briscoe. Payne and Mulvey were not the only architects used in Old Braeswood, just the first. Other architects that designed houses in Braeswood included Joseph Finger, Joseph W. Northop, Jr., Cameron Fairchild, Hollis E. Parker, Maurice J. Sullivan, Harvin C. Moore, and Theo G. Keller. The first house completed in Braeswood was at 7404 Greenbriar at Main St. Early purchasers of houses in Braeswood included former Governor William P. Hobby, members of the Fondren family, various oil company and corporate executives, lawyers, and doctors.

The Braeswood Corporation foundered, however, during the stock market crash of October 1929, and home construction slowed in the new neighborhood. In early 1930, the Braeswood Corporation dissolved and its interests and obligations were transferred to the Belmain Company, which maintained its office in the former Braeswood Corporation sales office on Main. The Belmain Company continued the landscaping of the subdivision and, during 1930, sold several speculatively built houses. It even built two new houses in 1931: the stucco-surfaced, tile-roofed "Belmain Mediterranean" designed by Charles S. Chase at 2315 Glenn Haven, and a brick-faced, American colonial-style house designed by J.W. Northop, Jr., at 2341 Glenn Haven.

Although twenty-two houses were built in Section One between 1930 and 1935, home construction did not really take off again until the 1935. Although the neighborhood remained on the edge of town in the 1930s, Houston annexed Braeswood in 1937. After Braeswood Corporation dissolved, portions of the original tract were sold off to new developers, and the neighborhood continued to develop in spurts through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The various sections of the neighborhood, developed over twenty-five years by different individuals, are quite distinct in character and architectural style, reflecting the era of development and the city's changing residential patterns. A detailed history of the neighborhood and its unique homes can

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be found in the publication, *Braeswood: An Architectural History*, written by architectural historian Stephen Fox.

2240 Glen Haven

In 1931, Wesley Fielden Holley and his wife Jessie E. purchased the property at 2240 Glen Haven Blvd from the Belmain Corporation. The 1931 directory lists W. Fielden Holley as a contractor living at 1815 Rosedale Ave. In 1938, Holley's occupation is listed as 'real estate' with an office at 1206 Texas Ave and residence at 33 West Thornton.

The house at 2240 Glen Haven first appears in the City Directories in 1931-2, when it is listed as vacant. The following year, 1932-3, William and Dolores Welder Crabb appear in the directory as the first residents of the house. William J. Crabb was a special agent at Underwriters Salvage Co. Dolores was the daughter of James F. Welder of Victoria, Texas, a cattle rancher and chairman of the board of the Victoria National Bank. Her great-grandparents were Dolores de la Portilla and James Power, the latter the co-founder of the Power-Hewetson Colony. Dolores left Old Braeswood for River Oaks after the death of her father, living with William Crabb, the first of her four husbands, in a 1935 house designed by John Staub at 2416 Pine Valley Drive, and described by Stephen Fox as "a magnificent Spanish colonial style house demolished in the mid-80s after her death."

In 1938, Walter and Eugenia Mengden purchased the house at 2240 Glen Haven from the Holleys. Although the Crabbs were listed as owners of the house in the city directories 1932-1935, this appears to have been in error. As the Holleys appear to have never lived in the house and Mr. Holley is listed as a contractor in the 1931 directory, it may be that Mr. Holley built the house at 2240 Glen Haven on spec, renting it first to the Crabbs before selling it to the Mengdens in 1938.

Walter H. Mengden was born in 1903, and worked as a landman for Superior Oil Company during the years the family lived on Glen Haven Blvd. Walter and his wife Eugenia, born in 1905, had two sons, Walter Jr. and Carl, and a daughter, Mary Patricia. By 1954, the Mengdens had moved to 3730 Willowick Road in River Oaks, and Walter had become a Vice President at Superior Oil. Eugenia died in 1983 and Walter Sr. in 1986.

Walter 'Mad Dog' Mendgen, Jr.

Walter Mengden, Jr., was born October 25, 1926, and was 11 years old when his parents bought the house at 2240 Glen Haven in 1938. When Walter was 20, he moved out of the main house and into the garage apartment at the rear of the property. Walter attended the University of Texas and University of Texas Law School, served in the U.S. Army in the early 1950s, and was admitted to the Texas Bar in 1954.

Between 1971 and 1982, Walter Mengden was a Texas state legislator from Houston and was known as "Mad Dog Mengden." He served in the Texas House from 1971-1973 and represented the Houston-area Senate District 13 in the Texas Senate from 1973 until his retirement in 1982. Mengden served as the President Pro Tempore of the Texas Senate in the 67th Legislature, 1981-1983.

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Apparently Mengden got his nickname “Mad Dog” because he had a reputation for opposing almost any bill that was introduced. This becomes less surprising knowing that he was a Republican when nearly all Texans were Democrats. Legend has it that when Mengden “rose to speak, the rest of the Representatives would start barking and howling.” There is also a colorful story, perhaps apocryphal, that Miss Ima Hogg once confronted Mad Dog in an elevator, and berated him for being a Republican when his parents and grandparents had been Democrats. According to one version, she even gave him a light whack on the leg with her cane.

Mengden is remembered for his support for adopting a statewide initiative and referendum (I&R) process in Texas. A state leader on the issue, Mengden pushed unsuccessfully for I&R at the Texas state constitutional convention in 1974, and continued to support it until his retirement in 1982. In both 1980 and in 1982, the state's Republican Party endorsed an I&R measure, but the movement never took off statewide after opposition arose from lobbyists and major corporate interests. When George W. Bush was elected Governor in 1994, he allowed the state's Republican Party to remove the pro I&R plank from the Party's platform and replace it with an anti I&R platform, thus ending any chances of I&R being adopted in Texas in the foreseeable future.

Mengden is also remembered for being part of the ‘Dirty Thirty’- the name given to thirty members of the 1971 Texas House of Representatives, both Democrats and Republicans - who grouped against Speaker of the House Gus Mutscher and other Texas officials charged in a bribery-conspiracy investigation by the United States Securities and Exchange Commission. The coalition of thirty Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, has been given credit for keeping the Sharpstown Stock Fraud Scandal alive as a political issue.

In September 1971 a Travis County grand jury indicted Mutscher and two colleagues for conspiracy to accept a bribe and accepting a bribe. Mutscher was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to five years' probation. Although not brought to trial, Governor Preston Smith and Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes saw their political careers effectively ended.

Walter Mengden Jr is currently 84 years old and lives in Central Texas.

Later Owners and Occupants

Later owners and occupants of the house include John P. and Jane Connor in the 1950s; Joseph M. Levy from 1958-1962; Albert Waina, a beauty operator at the nearby Shamrock Hotel in 1968; Dr. William Hawes, a UH professor in the Jack J. Valenti School of Communications, and his wife Ella Hawes, 1969-1989; Jim Gwinn, an architect, and Linda Webb, an organizational development consultant, 1989-2004; and Leonard and Susan Teich, the current owners, both retirees from Conoco. Susan Teich is also a former Assistant City Attorney for the City of Houston.

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- (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 Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Holley-Mengden House at 2240 Glen Haven Boulevard.

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EXHIBIT A
HOLLEY-MENGDEN HOUSE
2240 GLEN HAVEN BOULEVARD



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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
HOLLEY-MENGDEN HOUSE
2240 GLEN HAVEN BOULEVARD

