

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Early Republic House

OWNERS: Ann Lents and J.D. Heaney II

APPLICANTS: Same

LOCATION: 3260 Chevy Chase Drive - River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: IIa

HPO FILE NO: 11L243

DATE ACCEPTED: Jun-17-2011

HAHC HEARING: Jul-14-2011

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 13 & Tracts 12 & 14A, Block 9, River Oaks Country Club Estates, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick veneer residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Early Republic House was constructed in 1925-26 and designed by the prolific Houston architect, John F. Staub. It was one of two early speculative houses commissioned by the River Oaks Corporation and designed by Staub. The body of work created by Staub in Houston is substantial and includes many of the most iconic houses in River Oaks and Broadacres.

Hugh Potter, the President of the River Oaks Corporation, purchased the house in 1926 and lived there until his death in 1968. Potter was one of the developers of the River Oaks subdivision along with his longtime friends, the Hogg Brothers. Hugh Potter was the public face of River Oaks, and created numerous scrapbooks that meticulously chronicled life in the neighborhood. Much of what we know about River Oaks today is due to Potter's record-keeping.

The Early Republic House is a significant piece of Houston's architectural history. It has been featured in many publications, including: *The Country Houses of John F. Staub* by Stephen Fox; *The Architecture of John F. Staub* by Howard Barnstone; River Oaks Magazine (1938, cover feature); and *River Oaks: A Pictorial Presentation of Houston's Residential Park* published in 1929.

The Early Republic House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The design of the Early Republic House commenced in 1924 when Will Hogg requested that the company build 15 speculative houses "of modest type" that would convey to future River Oaks owners the architectural and cultural aspirations of the development. The houses were to cost no more than \$20,000 including an architect's fee and all construction costs. The houses would then retail for no more than \$27,500. The architects commissioned to design houses were Birdsall P. Briscoe, Sam H. Dixon, Jr., Joseph W. Northrop, Jr. and John F. Staub. All house plans were to be approved by Will, Mike or Ima Hogg. Much evidence exists that Ima worked closely on the plans for these houses, including the Early Republic House.

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Both houses designed by Staub, the Latin Colonial House at 3374 Chevy Chase Drive and the Early Republic House, were not considered large houses, and were thus designed as models for middle and upper-middle class families. The two different styles of the Staub speculative houses convey the idea that a variety of architectural styles was allowed in River Oak, but craftsmanship and detailing were of utmost importance to the permanence of the neighborhood.

The Early Republic House was marketed at a price tag of \$39,000, well above the targeted price of \$27,500. When the house did not sell after several months on the market, Hugh Potter bought the house for himself and his family. In a letter to Will Hogg in October 1926, Potter wrote: “I am taking Staub No. 2, and am moving into it now. It doesn’t exactly suit my needs, but it is close enough, and I think it almost essential for me to live in River Oaks.”

Hugh Potter

Hugh Potter, the President of the River Oaks Corporation, was born on August 8, 1888 in Gainesville, Texas. He attended the University of Texas, where he was the student body president and a founder of the Friars Club. He attended law school at Harvard University and was a lawyer for many years before joining his long-time friends the Hogg Brothers in their real estate ventures. Hugh Potter was the public face of River Oaks. Potter and the Hoggs marketed River Oaks as not just a neighborhood but a lifestyle of exclusivity, an idea which persists to this day. Stephen Fox describes the marketing imagery as: “...consciously and repeatedly used to construct community identity that emphasized civic idealism, elite status, and suburban exclusivity.” Potter tirelessly marketed River Oaks through the River Oaks Magazine, Forum of Civics, magazines and newspapers, and other sources. He also created numerous scrapbooks, available at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center of the Houston Public Library, that meticulously chronicled life in River Oaks. Much of what we know now about River Oaks is due to Potter’s record-keeping. Potter was a member of St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, River Oaks Country Club, the Executive Committee of the Bank of the Southwest, and a lifetime member of the Houston Board of Realtors. He and his wife Lucille had two children, William and Joan. Hugh Potter lived in the house until his death in 1968. The house later sold to Wesley West, who owned the property next door.

West sold the house to Max and Mary Lents in 1979. Max R. Lents was born in Oklahoma and received his B.S. in Petroleum Engineering from the University of Oklahoma (OU) in 1937. In 1998, he was inducted into the OU Distinguished Graduate Society for the College of Engineering. According to the OU site, Mr. Lents was one of the “pioneers in pressure maintenance and recycling of oil and gas fields.” He is best known for founding an international oil and gas consulting firm, now called Miller and Lents, in Houston with an OU classmate.

Max and Mary Lents sold the house to their daughter Ann Lents and her husband, David Heaney, in 1989. David Heaney was the key force behind a redrafting of the deed restrictions for River Oaks. Through his efforts, the neighborhood championed by Hugh Potter will continue to maintain its beauty and integrity.

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 here 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 River Oaks Country Club. As mentioned above, he was then retained by the Hogg brothers to design two model houses 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 houses that were never built, as well as designing renovations and extensions for existing houses. 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, some of the River Oaks homes designed by John F. 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 House, 2950 Lazy Lane, 1926 (as associate to Birdsall Briscoe), City of Houston Landmark
- 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.
- J. Robert Neal House, 2960 Lazy Lane, 1931, City of Houston Landmark
- George A. Hill, Jr. House, 1604 Kirby Drive, 1931
- Hugh Roy Cullen House, 1620 River Oaks Boulevard, 1933
- David D. Bruton House, 2923 Inwood Drive, 1933, City of Houston Landmark
- 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 House, 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

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- 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. Ben M. Anderson, 3740 Willowick, 1956 (S,R&H), City of Houston Landmark
- 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 the primary architect on the John Reagan High School project as well. Staub, Rather, and Howze also consulted with Jim Goodwin of Pierce and Pierce in the new building and planetarium for the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The house at 3260 Chevy Chase Drive is a two story, brick veneered house designed in 1925-26 by John F. Staub. The house was enlarged for Hugh Potter by John Staub. The architecture of the Early Republic House is strictly Federal. The house is rectangular in plan and faces south on Chevy Chase Drive. It is sited in the center of its lot. The house is a painted brick, three-part house with set-backed wings flanking both sides of the center portion. At one point, the east side wing contained an open porch on the first level, but Hugh Potter retained John Staub to add onto the house after it was completed. The front façade of the house was also pushed forward 10 feet by Staub for Hugh Potter, but otherwise remained the same.

The central portion of the house is five bays wide. The main detailing of the house is expressed in its entryway. The Federal paneled door has sidelights and a fanlight above. Above the fanlight is an arched inset with ironwork taken from scraps from the completed Latin Colonial House.

The house at 3260 Chevy Chase is a significant house that has been featured in many publications, including: *The Country Houses of John F. Staub* by Stephen Fox, *The Architecture of John F. Staub* by Howard Barnstone, River Oaks Magazine (1938, cover feature), the American Institute of Architects Tour of River Oaks, and *River Oaks: A Pictorial Presentation of Houston's Residential Park* (1929).

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Houston Chronicle, March 31, 1968.

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

Barnstone, Howard. "John Franz Staub," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed December 05, 2010.

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

Ferguson, Cheryl Caldwell. *River Oaks: 1920s Suburban Planning and Development in Houston*. The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Oct 2000).

Houston City Directories.

University of Oklahoma, <http://www.ou.edu/coe/audience/adf/dgs/1998.html>

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.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, 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;

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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.

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)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Early Republic House at 3260 Chevy Chase Drive.

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EXHIBIT A
EARLY REPUBLIC HOUSE
3260 CHEVY CHASE DRIVE



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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
EARLY REPUBLIC HOUSE
3260 CHEVY CHASE DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE

