

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Murray-Bertrand House
OWNERS: Albert and Melissa Grobmyer
APPLICANT: Courtney Tardy – GHPA
LOCATION: 3720 Inwood Drive – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: IIC
HPO FILE NO: 11LM245
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-16-2011
HAHC HEARING DATE: Jun-16-2011

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 13, Block 85, River Oaks Section 11, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic, wood frame, brick veneer, two-story, single-family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Murray-Bertrand House, located at 3720 Inwood Drive, was constructed in 1946 and designed by Houston architect, Hermon Lloyd. The two-story painted brick house is in a restrained traditional style with elements of Neo-classical and Colonial Revival architecture. Lloyd designed many houses in River Oaks, and in conjunction with Harvin C. Moore, designed public and commercial buildings such as the Memorial Center and Chapel at Rice University. Moore and Lloyd also designed a building at 2006 West Alabama that became the first architectural office in Houston with central air conditioning.

The house at 3720 Inwood Drive was commissioned by William Gay and Reynolds Murray. Mr. Murray was an independent oilman. The second owner of the house, Jay Bertrand, was an independent businessman and Colonel in the Army Reserves during World War II.

The Murray-Bertrand House at 2404 Brentwood Drive meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

William Gay and Reynolds Murray bought the lot at 3720 Inwood Drive in 1935 off the plat map, as Inwood Drive had not yet been extended to that block. The Murrays were originally from East Texas and Mr. Murray was an independent oilman. They commissioned Hermon Lloyd to design the house, but it was not built because World War II intervened and building materials were unavailable. According to their son George Murray, a realtor and River Oaks resident, the house received one of the first building permits given out after the war ended.

The Murrays constructed the house in 1946, but they never lived there. During this period, Mrs. Murray suffered a heart attack and it was determined that she had a heart condition. They moved to Tanglewood into a one-story home.

The Murrays sold the house to Gussie and Jay Bertrand, who were to remain in the house until their deaths in 1998. Jay Bertrand was born in 1906 in Raywood, Texas. He graduated from Heights High School (now called Reagan High) and from Texas A&M in 1929. He met his wife Gussie Frances Ballerstedt (b. 1909) in Bryan, Texas, where she lived with her family. They moved to Conroe and then settled in Houston in the 1930s.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

According to his obituary, Jay Bertrand began his business career at the age of 12, selling magazines and subsequently molasses, advertisements and “real silk” hose door to door, which he said was the foundation for his career as an independent businessman with interests in oil and timber. He owned property in Montgomery County and was a member of the San Jacinto River Authority Board. He also established a liquefied gas distributing company in South Carolina.

Jay Bertrand played an active role in the Houston efforts of World War II, serving as a recruiter at Fort Sam Houston and then serving in the Pacific. He remained active in the Army Reserves and acquired the rank of Colonel.

The Bertrands were members of St. Martin’s Episcopal Church. They had two children, Bonnie Bliss Bertrand Chernosky and James Richard Bertrand. The Bertrands both died in the year 1998.

The home sat vacant for two years and was marketed as a teardown before being purchased by Barry Caver in 2000. Mr. Caver has purchased numerous homes in River Oaks in an effort to save them from the wrecking ball. He has either stabilized the homes and resold them or lived in them. He rehabilitated the Bertrand House and lived there for just two years before selling to the current owners. In an interview, Mr. Caver spoke about the cedar closets in the home and the extensive wood floors and moldings.

Hermon Lloyd

Hermon Lloyd (1909-1989), a 1931 Rice graduate, teamed up with Harvin Moore, another undergraduate in the Rice architecture program, to design party decorations and sets. The two worked well together, and in 1934, they formed the firm of Moore & Lloyd. They were first located in the Citizen’s State Bank Building downtown. Several years later, they designed a building at 2006 West Alabama which became the first architectural office in Houston with central air conditioning. According to Harvin Moore’s son Barry Moore, “Moore and Lloyd were soon very popular and very busy. The reputation of the firm rested largely on their works in River Oaks.”

The firm’s work continually increased during the 1930s. The commercial work was often for the same clients as their residential designs. The residences were usually traditional in style and the commercial buildings were more “Moderne.” Barry Moore attributes this to the fact that clients wished to appear “progressive in business and traditional in family values.”

During their partnership, Moore and Lloyd designed many commercial, civic and military buildings, including over 84 homes in River Oaks. The catalogue of Moore and Lloyd works put together by Michael Wilson for the Houston Public Library is extensive.

By the end of the 1930’s, Moore and Lloyd began to move in different directions and, by the entry of the U.S. into World War II, the firm had dissolved. Hermon Lloyd sought out more commercial contracts and established the firms Lloyd and Morgan and then Lloyd, Morgan and Jones. He died in 1989.

A selection of their River Oaks homes includes:

- 3379 Inwood (Hamman House, City Landmark)
- 2132 Troon (Kendall-Levine House, City Landmark)
- 3310 Del Monte Drive (1934) (demolished)
- 2228 Del Monte Drive (1934) (demolished)

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- 2133 Pine Valley (1935) “*Home of the Month: McCall’s*”
- 1839 Kirby Drive (1935) (demolished)
- 1927 Bellmeade Road (1935) (demolished) “*Architectural Forum: 101 Finest Small Homes*”
- 2125 Bellmeade Road (1935)
- 3257 Ella Lee (1935) (demolished)
- 2940 Chevy Chase (1935)
- 1558 Kirby Drive (1935)
- 2148 Looscan Lane (1935)
- 2117 Looscan Lane (1935) (demolished) “*Home of the Month: McCall’s*”
- 2129 Looscan Lane (1936) (demolished)
- 1112 Shepherd Drive (1935)
- 2404 Brentwood Drive (1935)
- 2216 Chilton Road (1936) (demolished) “*Home of the Month: McCall’s*”
- 2137 Chilton Road (1936) (demolished)
- 2132 Troon Road (1936)
- 1801 Sharp Place (1937)
- 3239 Locke Lane (1936)
- 1537 Kirby Drive (1936)
- 2022 Chilton Road (1936) (demolished)
- 2136 Pelham Drive (1936)

- 3215 Ella Lee (1937)
- 2036 Chilton Road (1936) (demolished)
- 3324 Ella Lee Lane (1937) (demolished)
- 3068 Reba (1937)
- 5 Briarwood Court (1937)
- 2440 Inwood Drive (1937)
- 3417 Ella Lee Lane (1938)
- 3412 Piping Rock Lane (1938)
- 7 Briarwood Court (1938)
- 3208 Chevy Chase Drive (1938)
- 1910 Kirby Drive (1938) (demolished)
- 2327 Claremont Lane (1938) (demolished)
- 2057 Claremont Lane (1939)
- 3689 Del Monte Drive (1939) (demolished)
- 3413 Piping Rock Lane (1939)
- 2033 Claremont Lane (1940)
- 1909 Olympia Drive (1939)
- 3610 Meadow Lake Lane (1940) (demolished)
- 3225 Reba Drive (1940)
- 1665 Willowick (1940) (demolished)
- 3666 Chevy Chase Drive (1940) (demolished)

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. Since its creation, River Oaks has been published in national news, real estate, and design media, and has 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.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission Planning and Development Department

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, such as Westmoreland (1902), Avondale (1907), Montrose (1911), Audubon Place (1906), Cherryhurst (1908), Binz, Southmore (1914), and Courtland Place (1906). 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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

This 4,402 square foot two-story painted brick home is in a restrained traditional style with elements of Neo-classical and Colonial Revival architecture. The Colonial Revival style was popular in the United States between 1890 and 1935. This style resulted from a rejection of the Queen Anne Revival style, and a desire to return to a more "traditional" American building type. This style draws from the simple building forms typical of early American colonial structures, and elements of classical or Georgian architecture. It is closely related to the Neoclassical Revival and Georgian Revival styles. Colonial Revival residential structures are typically one or two stories, with hipped or gabled roofs and symmetrical facades. The entryway or porch is the primary focus, often highlighted with a decorative crown or pediment. Other areas of elaboration are the cornice and windows.

The Neoclassical style was popular between 1895 and 1940. The popularity of the Neoclassical style resulted from the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. For the exposition, the most renowned architects designed models of dramatic colonnaded buildings arranged around a central court. The exposition was widely photographed and soon these models became the most fashionable house in the country. Neoclassical houses are usually two stories and feature elaborate Roman or Greek inspired, full height columns, and symmetrically balanced windows and doors.

The Murray-Bertrand House was designed sometime between 1935 and the beginning of World War II. The house is four parts wide and is sited in the middle of an 11,399 square foot lot facing south. The east bay of the house projects from the main house and features an 8-over-8 wood sash window on the first story with an 8-over-8 wood sash window on the second story. A belt course of brick in a dentil pattern runs between the first and second stories of the home.

The other three bays are inset under a full-height colonnade of square columns with Doric capitals. A wide plain entablature runs around the home under the hipped roof. The second bay features the entry on the first story and two 6-over-6 wood sash windows above on the second story. The entry features double wooden doors with three lights each and a six light transom above. The doors and transom are framed by a wooden rectangular crown and pilasters. The third and fourth bays of the home feature 8-over-8 windows on the first story and 8-over-8 windows on the second story. All front windows have full-sized wooden shutters (a new addition).

The home is in excellent condition and has been recently renovated.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission Planning and Development Department

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Interview with Barry Caver by Courtney Tardy, March 2011.

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Johnston, Marguerite, Houston: The Unknown City 1836-1946, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1991.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee, Field Guide to American Houses, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984.

Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, 1924-February 1951, volume 11, sheet 1127.

Wilson, Michael C. Harvin C. Moore: Houston Architect, Houston Public Library 1987.

Interview with Barry Moore by Kelley Trammell, September, 2006

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 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | |
- (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;

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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.

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 Murray-Bertrand House at 3720 Inwood Drive.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A
MURRAY-BERTRAND HOUSE
3720 INWOOD DRIVE



