

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Hill-Perry House

OWNER: Samuel and Jonte Wesley

APPLICANT: Same

LOCATION: 3602 South MacGregor Way – Riverside Terrace

AGENDA ITEM: II.d

HPO FILE NO: 11L252

DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-15-2011

HAHC HEARING: Aug-17-2011

SITE INFORMATION

Tract 1, Block 55, Riverside Terrace Section 10, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic, two-story stone veneer single-family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Hill-Perry House at 3602 South MacGregor Way was built in 1949 for Dr. J. Ernest Hill, a prominent Houston dentist, and his wife, Hazle Hill. The house is unique to Riverside Terrace because of its use of Austin stone, an unusual choice for Houston. The house is designed in a traditional style but has a modern, streamlined appearance.

The Hills lived in the home from 1949-1968. It was then purchased by Drs. J.O. and Cynthia Shepard Perry. Dr. Cynthia Perry was a Professor at TSU, and is a former Ambassador to Sierra Leone and Burundi. She most recently was the United States Executive Director of the African Development Bank.

First platted in 1924, the affluent neighborhood of Riverside Terrace in southeast Houston became known as the 'Jewish River Oaks' from the 1930s through the 1950s, with homes designed by prominent architects such as John Staub and Birdsall P. Briscoe. Beginning in the 1950s, the neighborhood transitioned to primarily African-American families. The 1987 documentary "This Is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale" by Jon Schwartz gives a 60-year overview of the community and its struggle to integrate. The ownership change of 3602 South MacGregor Way from the Hills to the Perrys is representative of the rapid racial transition of Riverside Terrace that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Hill-Perry House meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4 for Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Dr. J. Ernest Hill was born in Smith County, Texas, on August 30, 1899. He was married to Hazle Hill, who was born in 1902 in Dallas and grew up in Coleman, Texas, and then Houston. The Hills were married in 1924 and were living in the Houston Heights by 1930. They bought the lot in Riverside Terrace in June of 1948, and began construction of the house. After Hazle Hill's death in 1961, Dr. Ernest Hill married Virginia Dickerson. The Hills lived at 3602 S. McGregor until 1968, when they moved to the Linkwood neighborhood.

Dr. Ernest Hill attended school at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, and taught school for two years before attending Texas University Dental College in Houston. He provided 53 years of professional dental service to citizens of Houston. Dr. Hill was an involved member

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

of the Houston community as President of the Houston Downtown Optimist Club and Governor of this District for the Optimist Club. He was a 65-year member of Masonic Lodge No. 1189 AF and AM, and a member of the Scottish Rite and Arabia Temple Shrine for over 50 years.

Dr. Ernest Hill died at the age of 92 on June 15, 1992. He was buried in the Forest Park Lawndale Cemetery.

The next owners of the home were the Drs. James O. and Cynthia Shepard Perry. The Council of American Ambassadors website contains the following history of Dr. Cynthia Perry:

“Dr. Perry was most recently the United States Executive Director of the African Development Bank. A native of Indiana, Dr. Perry was the US Ambassador to Sierra Leone from 1986-1989 and to Burundi from 1989-1993.

Her career began in 1957 with the Nichols Investment Corporation. Dr. Perry later joined the IBM Corporation as an educational representative in the Office Products Division. From 1968-1971, she was the Director of the National Teachers Corps at the University of Massachusetts, where she received her Doctorate in International Education in 1972. Joining the faculty of Texas Southern University in 1971, she was an Associate Professor and Associate Director of Teacher Corps/Peace Corps and then became a full Professor and Dean of International Affairs from 1978-1982.

Her first assignment to Africa was at the University of Nairobi in 1968 through Operation Crossroads Africa. From 1971-1973, Mrs. Perry and her husband, Dr. James O. Perry, trained a group of Peace Corps volunteers in Sierra Leone. In 1974, she led a special educational delegation to Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria and Liberia. She lived in Kenya from 1974-1976, trained Peace Corps paramedical volunteers, lectured at the University of Nairobi and was a consultant to the US Information Service in Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. In 1976, she was appointed Staff Development Officer at the UN Economic Commission for Africa. From 1982 until her appointment, Mrs. Perry was Chief of the Education and Human Resources Division in the Africa Bureau of the US Agency for International Development.”

Riverside Terrace

The first section of Riverside Terrace was platted in 1924. Development of the area was started by Henry Frederick MacGregor, who came to Houston in 1883 and began investing in real estate. By 1900, MacGregor was instrumental in extending Houston’s residential area southward by building several subdivisions in the South Main area.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, “street-car suburbs,” flourished in Houston and residential developments spurred extension of streetcar lines. But by the mid-1920s, the growing popularity of the automobile led to new “automobile suburbs” in Houston. Several of these were laid out on either side of Brays Bayou in the vicinity of Hermann Park. One such suburbs is Riverside Terrace.

When Riverside Terrace opened, early sales brochures stressed the premier location of this subdivision as being near the South Main cultural, medical, educational, and social facilities. The

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

first section of the project – an area bounded by Almeda, Blodgett, Live Oak, and Oakdale – was financed by the Guardian Trust Company. The developer, using the same sales rhetoric as the River Oaks Corporation, noted that there would be “rigid building restrictions...so that each purchaser is assured beforehand of the exact character of the improvements with which he will be surrounded.” The successful venture attracted other developers, and the suburbs of Washington Terrace and Riverside were platted. Today, the entire area is known as Riverside Terrace.

The area was once home to a large number of Jewish families such as the Weingartens, the Fingers, the Sakowitz, and the Battlesteins, who were excluded from River Oaks. From the 1930s until the post-war era, the neighborhood became known as the ‘Jewish River Oaks,’ and was just as affluent and swanky.

The demographics began to change drastically in the 1950s when the first African-American family moved into the neighborhood. In 1952, a wealthy African-American cattleman named Jack Caesar moved his family into the neighborhood. He stayed despite a bomb being detonated on his front porch. In the middle 1950s, the white and Jewish families began moving out to the suburbs. In the early 1960s, white residents who saw potential for an integrated neighborhood tried to stabilize it by posting signs that read: "This Is Our Home, It Is Not For Sale," which is also the title of a 1985 documentary by Jon Schwartz that gives a 60-year overview of the community and its struggle to integrate. Eventually all but a few whites and Jews succumbed to pressures by their neighbors' departure and left Riverside Terrace entirely. It wasn't long before Riverside Terrace was once again home to prominent, wealthy families – this time African-American. College professors, doctors, lawyers and politicians moved into the large homes and mansions. The change in ownership from the Hills to the Perrys in 1968 is representative of the rapid racial transition of Riverside Terrace that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.

Architects who designed some of the first homes in the neighborhood included John Chase, John Staub, Birdsall Briscoe, Bolton & Barnstone, and Joseph Finger. Several distinctive modern houses were designed by the office of Bailey A. Swenson. The architectural firm of MacKie and Kamrath also produced structures of modern design. One home, published in *Architectural Record* in 1942, was described as having excited neighborhood controversy for being so modern. Today, the neighborhood contains numerous examples of outstanding architecture from the late Art Deco and mid-century modern eras, interspersed with small motels and apartments.

Home construction and commercial development have recently revived, especially on the southern edge of the area. The homes in Riverside Terrace are as diverse as the characters that shaped its history. Houses range from 2,000 to 6,000 square feet. Lots can be as large as two acres. Prices range from \$30,000 to \$1 million.

While many changes have occurred over the years, Riverside Terrace continues to be home to many Houstonians who enjoy being a short distance from downtown, the Museum District, and the Medical Center.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Hill-Perry House is unique to Riverside Terrace because of its use of Austin stone, an unusual choice for Houston. The house is designed in a traditional style but has a modern, streamlined appearance. In this way, it is a representation away from strict Revival-style architecture into a more modern interpretation of traditionalism.

The designer of the Dr. J. Ernest Hill House is unknown, but the house is unique for the use of Austin stone. The Hill House was built in 1949 and covers 6,022 square feet on an acre-sized lot (46,818 square foot land area). The house was built as a residential single family home. It is sited to the east of the lot, allowing the natural topography of the western portion of the lot to form a sort of park for the home.

The home is one massive block, with an entrance in the center. It is covered with irregularly-sized stone laid in horizontal bands. The entrance bay is located slightly east of center under a front gabled roof. It features the entrance on the first floor. The entrance is an oversized wooden paneled door with an arched fanlight and sidelights. The entrance is recessed from the front façade, under an arched stone opening. The stone in the entryway is placed vertically around the entry and projects slightly from the façade. Above the entrance on the second story façade are two 12-light fixed metal windows surrounded by thick bands of stone that project slightly from the front façade, and stone label molds above. Centered under the roof in the attic story is a decorative blind oculus of stone.

To both sides of the entrance bay is a floor length 28-light fixed metal window capped by stone label molds and surrounded by thick bands of stone that project slightly from the front façade. On the second story are two 12-light fixed metal windows surrounded by bands of stone. The windows are placed just under the cornice of the house, which continues on all four sides of the house.

The roof of the house is covered with composite shingles. The current owner has made some alterations to the front façade of the house, including replacing the windows of the house. This alteration does not significantly change the appearance of the house. The house is in excellent condition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Block Books

Daily Court Review, "Officers named by Optimist Club," April 5, 1935.

Daily Court Review, "Release of Liens," July 19, 1948.

www.umassmag.com/winter_2002/PROFILE__SETTING_A_COURSE_243.html

www.americanambassadors.org

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.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A
HILL-PERRY HOUSE
3602 SOUTH MACGREGOR WAY



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
HILL-PERRY HOUSE
3602 SOUTH MACGREGOR WAY
NOT TO SCALE

