

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: James W. and Lella D. Cain House
OWNERS: Margaret and John Hill III
APPLICANTS: Same
LOCATION: 3015 Del Monte Drive - River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: III.a
HPO FILE NO: 12L270
DATE ACCEPTED: May-30-2012
HAHC HEARING: Aug-15-2012

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 2, Block 31, River Oaks Sec. 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, traditional residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The James W. and Lella D. Cain House, located at 3015 Del Monte, was built in 1929 and designed in the English Tudor style by noted Houston architect, Charles Oliver. Oliver was the in-house architect for River Oaks Corporation from 1926 to 1931. Eventually, Oliver would design 75 homes in the upscale River Oaks neighborhood in many styles including Georgian, Tudor, Dutch Colonial, Mediterranean and Norman.

The original owners of 3015 Del Monte, James W. and Lella Cain, occupied the house from 1929 to mid-1970s. James Cain, a mechanical engineer, was involved in the sulphur mining industry. In 1928 he and his business partner Alfred H. Smith established the Duval Texas Sulphur Company in Palangana, Texas.

The James W. and Lella D. Cain House meets criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Charles Oliver

The house at 3015 Del Monte was designed by noted Houston architect, Charles Oliver, who was the in-house architect for the River Oaks Corporation from 1926 to 1931. According to Stephen Fox, Oliver was a native of Dallas and had previously worked in the architectural/construction firm of the Russell Brown Company, which constructed many stylish homes in Dallas and Houston during the first quarter of the 20th century. Oliver worked for the Russell Brown Company from 1916 until 1926, when he was hired away by the River Oaks Corporation. Eventually, Oliver would design 75 homes in the upscale River Oaks neighborhood in many styles including Georgian, Tudor, Dutch Colonial, Mediterranean and Norman. Some of his most distinctive homes include the Mediterranean style homes, of which approximately six are still standing in River Oaks. Some of Oliver's houses include:

- 2203 Brentwood, 1925 (Mediterranean)
- 1903 Bellmeade, 1926 (Mediterranean)
- 2508 Pelham Drive, 1927 (Charles Oliver's family home)
- 1528 Kirby Drive, 1927-28

- 1827 Kirby Drive, 1927-28
- 3394 Chevy Chase, c. 1928 (Georgian)
- 1925 Bellmeade, 1928 (Registered Landmark Home)
- 2007 River Oaks Boulevard, 1929 (home of Mike Hogg, developer of River Oaks)
- 3015 Del Monte, c. 1929 (Tudor)
- 2504 Pelham Drive, c. 1929 (Norman)
- 2141 Pine Valley, c. 1930 (Tudor)
- 3223 Chevy Chase, c. 1934 (Mediterranean)
- 3358 Inwood Drive, 1930 (Christie home)
- 1407 Kirby Drive, 1930 (Manorial)
- 2970 Lazy Lane, 1934 (as consulting architect to James C. Mackenzie with Birdsall Briscoe)

James W. Cain

James Walker Cain was born in Tyler, Texas, on September 16, 1882. He was the son of Ben B. Cain, a leading businessman in Tyler and Dallas, who was involved in numerous industries including banking, railroad, and utilities. Ben B. Cain was also a University of Texas Regent. James Cain's mother died when he was a baby and his father remarried when he was eight. James Cain graduated from Purdue University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1905. He moved to Houston, where he formed numerous businesses around railroad supplies and motor equipment. In 1920, he is listed in the City Directory as the President of the Cain Smith Petroleum Company. In 1924, Walker and business partner Alfred H. Smith found sulphur on the Palangana dome in Duval County in South Texas where they expected to find oil, and in 1928, they established the Duval Texas Sulphur Company. When no railroad company would build a line to Palangana, Cain built the San Diego and Gulf Railway, which constructed an eight mile spur connecting with the Texas-Mexican railroad. A description of the Cain Scholarship at the University of Texas from July 1962 tells us more about Cain's professional career:

“In 1932, he resigned as President of the Company to become Chairman of the Board. In 1950 the name of the company was changed to Duval Sulphur and Potash Company, and the operations were expanded to include production of potassium chloride in New Mexico and copper in Arizona. Mr. Cain served actively as a director of the company up to the time of his death. He also served his community as an outstanding civic leader. He created the Cain Foundation “exclusively and solely to, and in aid of, religious, charitable, educational or scientific purposes which are wholly of a public and non-profit nature.” Mr. Cain was a member of the Advisory Board of the Scott-White Memorial Hospital at Temple, Texas.”

Lella Dixon Cain was born in Beaumont, Texas, on July 29, 1896. She was the daughter of William and Minnie Lee Dibell Dixon. Her father was involved in the timber business and they lived in Houston in 1910, on McGowan Street. Her father's business took them to St. Louis, Missouri. Lella married James Walker Cain there in 1914, at the age of 18. They lived in Houston and had two sons – James Walker Cain Jr., who died in 1941, and Dixon Hill Cain. The Cains were members of Christ Church Cathedral.

The *Houston Post* reported on the construction of the house on November 7, 1929:

“Artist E.M. Schiwetz has pictured here the James Walker Cain residence, now under construction at 3015 Del Monte Drive, River Oaks, as it will appear when completed. The home is being erected on site two in block 31, a large wooded area facing north on Del Monte Drive. The Cain property has a frontage of 125 feet on Del Monte drive and a depth of 110 feet. The home was designed by Charles W. Oliver, A.I.A., and is being constructed by the River Oaks building department.”

Following Mr. Cain’s death in 1962, Mrs. Cain remained in the home until the mid-1970s; it was then purchased by James Niklos in 1981. Subsequent owners include John and Lynda Irvine, Scott and Nancy Atlas, and the current owners, who purchased the home in 2009

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.

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 girde 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

The home at 3015 Del Monte is 6,616 square feet and is sited in the center of a 26,775 square foot lot. The home is designed in an English Tudor style and is faced with a Flemish bond brick veneer. The house has steeply pitched cross gables with half-timbering and elaborate decorative brick work within the gables.

The main mass of the house has a steep pitched side gable roof with two projecting overlapping front gables. On the front, north façade, from the east moving west, there is one story side gable bay with a small sloping shed roof at the east end that ties into the main roof. On the front façade of the bay there is a grouping of three metal casement windows with ten panes in each. The shed roof overhangs the façade and there is an additional sloping shed roof projection that overhangs the window.

The main mass of the house continues with a section that includes a massive exterior chimney in the center and two 20-pane casement windows on either side. The chimney is higher than the main roof, and has two decorative shafts. On the second floor projecting from the main roof is a shed dormer, which is sided with wood clapboards and has two pairs of diamond-paned metal casement windows. These windows were moved three feet during the recent renovation – this was the only change made to the front façade of the house. Located on the east elevation is another exterior gable wall brick chimney.

The house has two projecting overlapping front gables of varying height. The entry is off-center in the smaller of the two gables. The door is inset from the entry and is wood paneled with glazing. The entry itself is a rectangular opening topped by a massive wood lintel. To the west of the entry in the front gable is a massive ten-part metal window with five 6-pane metal windows above and five 8-pane metal windows placed directly below. A metal planter with scrolled feet is located beneath the window. The gable line has a decorative detail of a vertically placed row of bricks.

Behind the entry is another front gable that projects forward from the main roof. It features a small 4-pane metal rectangular window on the first floor and half-timbering detail on the second floor façade, with brink infill in a herringbone pattern. At the top of the gable is a rookery detail executed in brick.

The westernmost section of the main mass of the house features a 4-paned rectangular metal window and a 4-part casement window with 8 panes each on the first floor. This section of the house also has a second story overhang with decorative wood brackets. The second story is half-timbered with stucco infill. Located on the second floor is an 8-pane metal casement window and to its west is another 4-part metal casement window with 10 panes in each.

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Benjamin B. Cain”, Texas Transportation Archive, www.ttarchive.com

“Cain Residence in River Oaks,” *Houston Post*, November 7, 1929.

Houston City Directories

“J.W. Cain, 79, Sulphur Firm Founder, Dies,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 18, 1962.

“Newsletter”, No. 11, 1962. University of Texas at Austin, Department of Geological Sciences.

Various resources from Ancestry.com

"Palagana, TX", Texas State Historical Association,
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hvp03>

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Erin Glennon, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

**EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS**

**JAMES W. AND LELLA D. CAIN HOUSE
3015 DEL MONTE DRIVE**



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
CAIN HOUSE
3015 DEL MONTE DRIVE

