

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Donald and Dorothy Thornbury House

AGENDA ITEM: II.b

OWNER: Charles and Miriam Prioleau

HPO FILE NO: 13L287

APPLICANT: Same as Owner

DATE ACCEPTED: 09/09/2013

LOCATION: 1903 Olympia Drive - River Oaks

HAHC HEARING: 09/12/2013

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 1, Block 74, River Oaks Sec. 9., City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick single family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Donald and Dorothy Thornbury House was designed by Harvin Moore and Hermon Lloyd in 1941. Donald H. Thornbury was a Vice President of the oil service company, Mid Continent Company. The house was later owned by Donald A. Lee, a partner in Lee Bros. Oil Company. Lee was a son of William E. Lee, a partner in the Yount Lee Oil Company.

The house was designed in the Colonial Revival style with elements of Georgian architecture. It is notable as one of the last projects that Moore and Lloyd designed together; their partnership dissolved around the end of 1941. The house was updated in 1988 by architect Frank Genzer, Jr., who seamlessly blended the original Moore & Lloyd house with the new addition.

The Donald and Dorothy Thornbury House at 1903 Olympia Drive meets criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Donald Hobson Thornbury and Dorothy Grace Moore Thornbury

Donald Hobson Thornbury was born September 17, 1897, in Kentucky, and by 1900, he was living with his family in Alabama. His father, Joseph A. Thornbury, worked for the railroad company. Donald graduated from the University of Alabama, Birmingham, where he was a member of Alpha Tau Omega. Dorothy Grace Moore Thornbury was born in Mexia, Texas, on September 20, 1904. She attended Southern Methodist University, where she was a member of Chi Omega. Donald and Dorothy met when Donald worked in Mexia for the National Supply Co. They married in 1925 in Dallas, and moved to Houston in 1926. At the time, Donald worked for the Rosendale and Reddaway Belting Company as a District Sales Manager for Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.

By 1930, the Thornburys were living in Southampton, where Donald worked as a salesman for Mid Continent Company, an oil well supplies business. By 1932, they moved to the Southmore neighborhood, and Donald was a Vice President at Mid Continent. The family moved to River Oaks in 1941.

The Thornbury family lived in the home until 1948, when Donald was transferred to Fort Worth to become an Executive Vice President for the company. They lived the remainder of their lives in Fort Worth.

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Donald and Dorothy Lee

Dwight D. Thomas, a Vice-President of Gulf Brewing Company, and his wife Dorothy lived in the home for just a year. The next owners, Donald and Dorothy Lee, purchased the home in 1949.

Donald A. Lee was born in Sour Lake, Texas, on August 17, 1914, the son of William E. Lee. William Lee was a founder of the Yount-Lee Company which struck the second largest oil find at Spindletop in 1925. By 1930, the family had moved to Montrose Boulevard in Houston. Donald was a graduate of San Jacinto High School, and attended the University of Texas. He served in the Navy during World War II. Donald and his three brothers, twin Ronald, Tommy, and W. Howard founded the Lee Brothers Oil Company. They were in operation by 1936.

Donald and his wife, Dorothy, settled in Braeswood in 1937 at 2329 Underwood Boulevard, in a home designed for them by notable Houston architect Eugene Werlin. Donald's sister, Faustine, had married Glenn McCarthy. McCarthy and his relatives owned numerous tracts in Braeswood. The Lees moved to 1903 Olympia in 1949. Donald Lee lived in the home on Olympia until the early 1980s, when it was purchased by L. M. Vaughan, Jr. Lee died on March 10, 1983; his wife Dorothy died in 1973. Mr. Lee's obituary states that he was a member of St. John the Divine, River Oaks Country Club, and the Houston Country Club. The current owners purchased the home from the Vaughan family in 2001.

Moore & Lloyd

Harvin C. Moore and Hermon Lloyd designed 1903 Olympia Drive. Moore's architectural papers are kept in the Houston Public Library (HPL), where the original plans for the home remain. Harvin Moore was born in Carmona, Texas, in 1905. As a child, the family relocated to Houston and lived in a two story frame house at 1314 Fairview. He graduated from Central High School in 1923 and began college at Rice Institute. He graduated "with distinction" and intended to go to medical school. After a brief stint in medical school, Moore reentered Rice to study architecture and received his BS in Architecture in 1930. Upon graduation, construction was slow due to the depression and Moore teamed up with Hermon Lloyd (1909-1989), 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 Moore's son Barry, in his introduction to the book, "Moore and Lloyd were soon very popular and very busy. The reputation of the firm rested largely on their works in River Oaks."

Hermon Lloyd was born in Houston on October 9, 1909. His father, a notary public and a manager at an insurance firm, died in 1919, and his mother became a clerk. Hermon was brought up in a house with his mother, sister, and grandmother. He attended Rice University and graduated with a B.S. in Architecture in 1931.

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 dichotomy to the fact that clients wished to appear "progressive in business and traditional in family values."

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During their partnership, Moore and Lloyd designed many commercial, civic, and military buildings, including over 84 homes in River Oaks. By the end of the 1930s, 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. The catalogue of Moore and Lloyd works put together by Michael Wilson for the Houston Public Library is extensive.

While many of the works of Moore & Lloyd are in the catalogue at the HPL, some are not. The Thornbury House is one such example of a project that is not included in the catalogue.

A selection of their River Oaks homes includes:

1934:

2228 Del Monte Drive (demolished)
3310 Del Monte Drive

1935:

1927 Bellmeade Road (demolished)
2125 Bellmeade Road
2404 Brentwood Drive
2940 Chevy Chase
3257 Ella Lee (demolished)
1558 Kirby Drive
1839 Kirby Drive (demolished)
2117 Looscan Lane (demolished)
2148 Looscan Lane
2133 Pine Valley Drive
1112 Shepherd Drive

1936:

2404 Brentwood Drive (City Landmark)
2022 Chilton Road (demolished)
2036 Chilton Road (demolished)
2137 Chilton Road (demolished)
2216 Chilton Road (demolished)
1537 Kirby Drive
3239 Locke Lane
2129 Looscan Lane
2136 Pelham Drive
2132 Troon Road (City Landmark)

1937:

5 Briarwood Court
3215 Ella Lee
3324 Ella Lee Lane (demolished)
2440 Inwood Drive (City Landmark)
3379 Inwood (City Landmark)
1801 Sharp Place
3068 Reba

1938:

7 Briarwood Court
2327 Claremont Lane (demolished)
3208 Chevy Chase Drive
3417 Ella Lee Lane
1910 Kirby Drive (demolished)
3412 Piping Rock Lane

1939:

2057 Claremont Lane
3689 Del Monte Drive (demolished)
1909 Olympia Drive
3413 Piping Rock Lane

1940:

3666 Chevy Chase Drive (demolished)
2033 Claremont Lane
3610 Meadow Lake Lane (demolished)
3225 Reba Drive
1665 Willowick (demolished)

1941:

1903 Olympia Drive

Frank Genzer, Jr.

Frank Genzer, Jr. was raised in Houston, Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas with a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Architecture. He received a Masters of Architecture from Notre Dame University. He has extensive experience in Community Planning, Design and Development. Genzer has spent a great deal of his career in Biloxi, Mississippi, and has been involved with numerous coastal planning projects. He served six years on the Biloxi Architectural Review Commission, and was Chairman of Biloxi's Tercentennial Image and Public Structures Committee. He also chaired the Coast 21's Gateway Committee. According to his resume, Genzer is "vitally interested in the visual appearance of Biloxi and has worked to ensure that Biloxi's unique architecture is not lost to overdevelopment through the lack of long term master planning and management."

Genzer has worked on numerous projects in River Oaks, and is currently working on a new project there. Among the projects he has worked on, in partnership with interior designer Sharon Baker, are:

- 2227 Brentwood (City Landmark)
- 2404 Brentwood
- 2198 Troon
- 2141 Pine Valley
- 2504 Stanmore (City Landmark)

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

1903 Olympia is a 5,273 square foot house sited facing west on a 15,300 square foot lot on the corner of Olympia Drive and Chevy Chase Drive. The home is designed in the Colonial Revival style with elements of Georgian elements.

The house is clad with brick laid in American Common bond and features a cross gable roof. The house features a brick exterior end chimney on the south elevation and a brick belt course between the first and second floors.

The front façade of the house remains unchanged, except for the replacement of wood panels with glass on the front door. The front entrance is offset to the north on the front façade. The front entrance is recessed and features a carved fluted surround. The front façade features three 8-over-8 wood sash windows with decorative wood panels underneath on the first floor and the second floor features two 8-over-8 wood sash windows and a 6-over-9 wood sash window located directly above the front entrance. All of the 8-over-8 sash windows feature non-operable decorative shutters. The front façade features a two-story decorative brick relief that surrounds the entrance and the 6-over-9 sash window above.

The north façade, facing Chevy Chase Drive moving west to east features two 6-over-6 wood sash windows on the first floor and two 6-over-6 wood sash windows on the second floor located under the side gable section of the house. The windows have non-operable decorative shutters.

Moving east is an original front gable wing. The two-story wing features a 6-over-6 sash window, a tri part bay window with two 4-over-4 sash windows and a center 6-over-6 sash window, and a non-original divided lite and wood paneled entry door with side lites on the first floor. The bay window and entry door are covered by a shed roof supported by square brick columns. The second story features two original 6-over-6 sash windows and an original 8-over-8

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sash window. The second story features a tri part bay window with two 4-over-4 sash windows and center 6-over-6 sash window. The second story bay window was constructed in 1988.

To the east of the two-story wing is a one-story kitchen wing, constructed in 1998. The site originally featured the original 1½-story attached garage. The façade of the kitchen wing features an exterior brick chimney. To the east of the chimney is a divided lite and wood paneled entry door. Inset from the kitchen is a one-story attached garage that features a 6-over-6 sash window and an overhead garage door.

The house is in excellent condition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Donald A. Lee,” *Houston Chronicle*, March 11, 1983.

Houston City Directories, various publishers

“Services Saturday for Donald A. Lee, oil man, member of prominent family,” *Houston Chronicle*, March 11, 1983.

Texas General Contractors’ Association Bulletin

Various resources from Ancestry.com

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.

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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- (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 Donald and Dorothy Thornbury House at 1903 Olympia Drive.

HAHC ACTION

Recommended to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Donald and Dorothy Thornbury House at 1903 Olympia Drive.

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EXHIBIT A

DONALD AND DOROTHY THORNBURY HOUSE
1903 OLYMPIA DRIVE



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EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP

DONALD AND DOROTHY THORNBURY HOUSE
1903 OLYMPIA DRIVE

