

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: James A. & Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr. House

AGENDA ITEM: C.4

OWNER: James A Reeder

HPO FILE NO.: 14L301

APPLICANT: Same

DATE ACCEPTED: Aug-6-2014

LOCATION: 3405 Meadow Lake Lane – River Oaks

HAHC HEARING: Aug-28-2014

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 9 and Tract 8, Block 59, River Oaks Section Seven, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a historic, two-story brick home.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The James A. and Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr. House at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane was designed by John F. Staub and John Thomas Rather, Jr. John Staub is best known as an architect of single-family houses and is closely identified with the River Oaks neighborhood, whereas his firm partner, John Rather, Jr., focused on institutional buildings. The house at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane was built in 1947-1948 for James A. and Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr., and was later owned by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bellows.

The two-story brick residence at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane was built in the Modern style. The residence features decorative brick banding and an inset entrance with a decorative wood entry door. The residence was renovated in 2013 and again in 2014. As part of the renovation, the roof was restored to its original condition with a cedar shake roof covering and all of the non-original metal windows were replaced with new metal awning style windows that match the original metal awning windows.

The James A. and Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr. House is significant for its occupants, architect, and architecture, and meets Criteria 1, 4, and 6 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

James A. Elkins

James A. Elkins Jr. was born on March 24, 1919, and raised in Houston, the son of “Judge” James A. Elkins Sr. and Isabel Mitchell Elkins. His father co-founded Vinson & Elkins Law Firm. Elkins Jr. graduated from Princeton in 1941 and began work at First City National Bank, the bank his father had founded as the Guaranty Trust Company in 1924. He eventually rose to be President of First City National Bank, and retired in 1988 as its senior chairman.

Margaret Wiess Elkins

Margaret Wiess Elkins was born October 26, 1922, in Houston. She was the daughter of Olga and Harry Wiess a founder of Humble Oil. Margaret Wiess attended Kinkaid School, The Ethel Walker School, and Pine Manor College.

The Elkins married in 1945, and soon after began constructing the house on Meadow Lake. The Elkins had three children: Elisa Elkins Joseph, James A. Elkins III, and Leslie Elkins Sasser.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Elkins were heavily involved in the business, civic, and cultural worlds of Houston. Mr. Elkins was a founding member of The Parks Board. He served on the boards of numerous

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companies and the boards of Baylor College of Medicine, Central Houston, Houston Grand Opera, the Menil Foundation, Princeton University, St. John's School, the Smithsonian Institute, Society for the Performing Arts, Texas Children's Hospital, and the University of Houston. The Elkins were also among the major benefactors of the Menil Collection, donating several pieces to the museum. They were members of Christ Church Cathedral. Margaret Wiess Elkins died May 19, 1999. James Elkins Jr. died February 21, 2006.

Frank & Alice Anne "Sanny" Bellows

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bellows purchased the home in 1963. Franklin William Bellows was born in Oklahoma City on July 15, 1922. He attended Kemper Military Academy and the University of Texas, where he pledged SAE. He served in World War II as a Marine.

Returning to Houston after the war, Frank joined his father and brothers at the WS Bellows Construction Company. The Bellows Company built such known structures as the San Jacinto Monument, the UT Tower, the Alley Theater, the Wortham Theater, and many other buildings. Frank Bellows also founded and operated Trinity Construction Company, which built bridges and roads.

Frank Bellows had many hobbies, among them jogging, golf, reading, and enameling. He owned a kiln, with which he created sculptures, portraits, and jewelry. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, UT's Littlefield Society, River Oaks Country Club, and St. John the Divine Church. He was also extremely active in Houston civic and business organizations.

Alice Anne "Sanny" Bellows was born in Fremont, Ohio in 1926. She attended Newcomb College at Tulane University. The Bellows had four children. Frank Bellows died September 3, 2013. His obituary carried the following sentence: "Their happy home on Meadow Lake Lane – in particular the kitchen table—was the gathering place for family and friends for 50 years."

The current owner purchased the home in 2012.

John F. 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 homes 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 homes that were never built, as well as designing renovations and extensions for existing homes. 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:

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- 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, Landmark
- Kemberton Dean House, 1912 Bellmeade, 1925, 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 Home, 2950 Lazy Lane, 1926 (as associate to Birdsall Briscoe), Demolished.
- 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, 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, 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 Home, 2909 Inwood Drive, 1935
- Oak Shadows for Ray L. Dudley, 3371 Chevy Chase, 1936
- Tom Scurry House, 1912 Larchmont, 1936, Landmark
- James L. Britton House, 1824 Larchmont, 1936
- Robert D. Strauss House, 1814 Larchmont, 1937
- John M. Jennings House, 2212 Troon Road, 1937
- 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) 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.

John Thomas Rather, Jr.

According to Stephen Fox's book *The Country Houses of John F. Staub*, John Thomas Rather, Jr. was Staub's first employee. He eventually became Staub's business partner. While Staub mainly focused on homes, Rather focused on institutional buildings for the University of Texas and the University of Houston, among others. Rather died in 1968, and Staub dissolved their firm shortly after.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The James A. and Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr. House at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane is a two-story 6,196 square foot residence sited in the center of a 17,025 square foot lot on the corner of Meadow Lake Lane and Claremont Lane. The residence is faced with brick and the roof was restored to its original condition of a cedar shake roof. The home was renovated in 2013 and again in 2014. As part of the 2014 renovation, all of the non-original metal windows were replaced with new metal awning style windows to match the original windows.

The house at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane has been extensively described in Stephen Fox's 2007 book *The Country Houses of John F. Staub*:

“The street front of the Elkins House is notable for its lack of windows, an indication that it was equipped with central air-conditioning. Staub incorporated subtle volumetric recessions and projections as well as variations in the bonding pattern of its sandstruck buff brick facing to animate the planar street front of the house and balance horizontal extension with vertical thrust. A low-pitched hipped roof, with clipped eaves on the north-facing street front and wider overhangs on the other faces of the house, confirmed the house's horizontal planarity. Awning windows, which Staub and Rather used frequently in the 1940s, were aligned with brick courses. The low-set, cast-iron decorative panel in front of the undivided plate-glass stair window and above the recessed front door contained a pattern of rectangle and squares that were reiterated in differing formats in the paneled front door and the wood-framed screened door. A strategically placed hedge screened a street-facing double-car garage, which Staub dropped down to street level, introducing a subtle split-level sectional shift in the ground floor of the house.”

The house is faced in brick and the front façade features decorative brick banding. The residence features a hip roof. The entrance is offset from the center of the house and is inset at angles with a decorative wood door surround. Moving east to west on the north elevation the first floor features a 4-lite metal awning window, a wood paneled entrance door with a wood screen door with a decorative wood panel, a 4-lite metal awning window, and a wood and glass garage door. The second floor moving east to west features a 4-lite metal awning window and a single lite fixed window with a decorative metal balconette centered over the entrance. The second floor of the north elevation steps back and the west corner of the elevation features a 4-lite fixed window and a 4-lite metal awning window. The north elevation features an exterior brick chimney with a metal chimney cap, a wide band brick belt course between the first and second floors, decorative horizontal brick banding on the second floor, and two vertical brick bands frame the entrance and run from the first floor to the second floor.

The east elevation facing Claremont Lane features a 4-lite metal awning window on the first floor and a 4-lite metal window on the second floor. On the south corner of the east facade are adjustable horizontal full-height louvers of wood which delineate a back porch and were designed to direct the prevailing breeze.

An old one-story wing down the west side of the house which contained a breezeway and maids quarters, and to which a second story addition was added in the 1960s, was demolished and a new one story addition in harmony with the original design has been constructed in its place. Closets and

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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 James A. & Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr. House at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane.

HAHC ACTION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the James A. & Margaret Wiess Elkins Jr. House at 3405 Meadow Lake Lane.

**EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS**

3504 MEADOW LAKE LANE





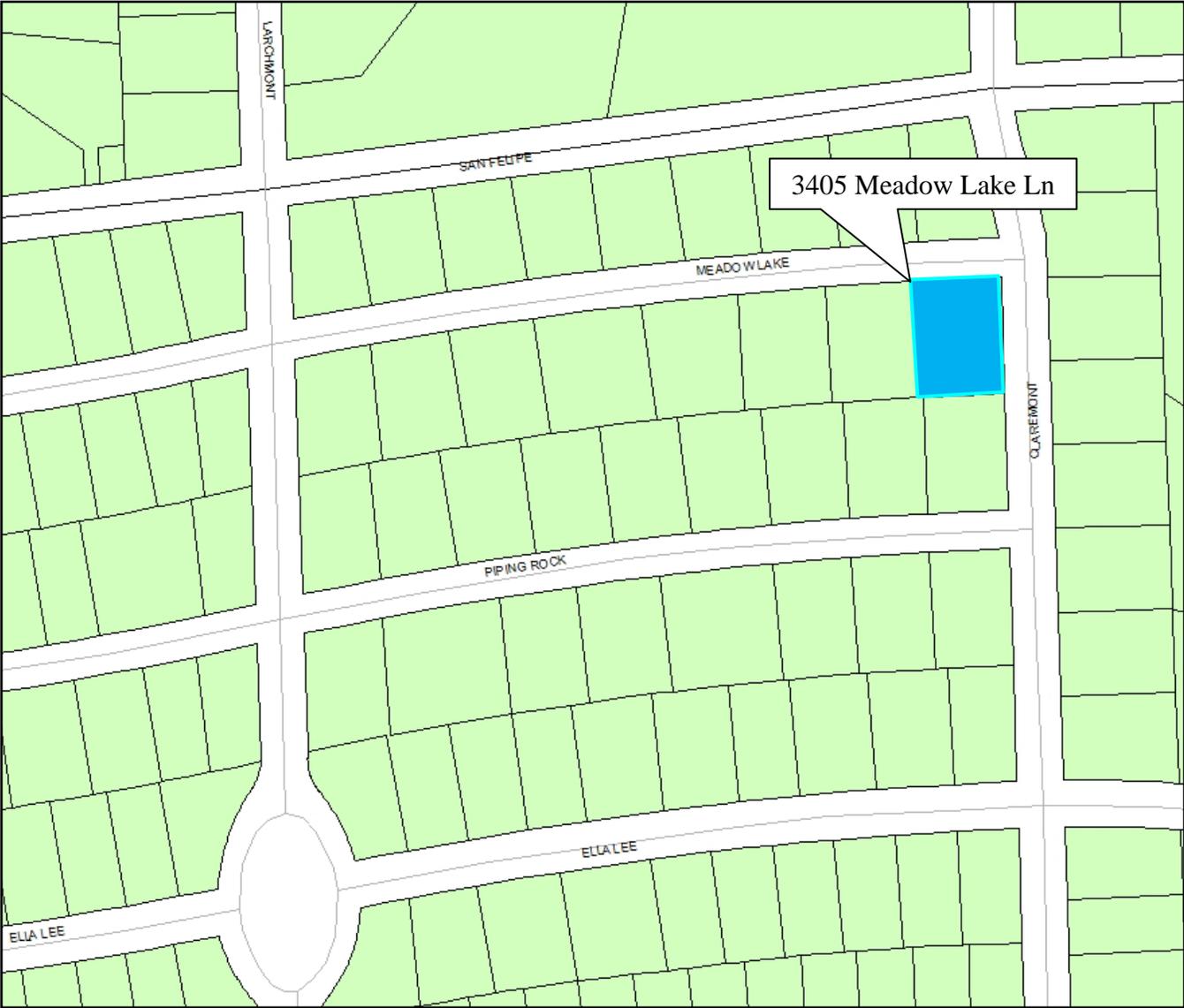
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EXHIBIT B SITE LOCATION MAP

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EXHIBIT B SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP

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