

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Dr. & Mrs. James G. Flynn House
OWNERS: William Toomey II and Courtney Toomey
APPLICANT: Same as Owners
LOCATION: 2129 Brentwood Drive – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: C
HPO FILE NO: 15L311
DATE ACCEPTED: Aug-17-2015
HAHC HEARING: Aug-27-2015

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 8A, Block 46, River Oaks Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site contains a historic two-story house in the Latin Colonial style. The residence faces north at 2129 Brentwood Drive.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Dr. & Mrs. James G. Flynn House at 2129 Brentwood Drive is a significant example of River Oaks Latin Colonial design, a local style of architecture promoted by Houston philanthropist and arts patron Ima Hogg and popularized in the 1920s by architects John Staub and Birdsall P. Briscoe. The form was emulated by other architects, including Charles S. Chase, who designed the Brentwood Drive house in 1929 for Dr. and Mrs. James G. Flynn.

Architect Charles S. Chase studied architecture at the Pratt Institute in New York City from 1911 to 1915, after which he spent two years at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Before forming his own practice, Charles A. Chase was an associate partner with Joseph Finger from 1926 to 1929.

Dr. James Flynn attended the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 1905 and trained as a surgeon and in 1927 opened an office in the downtown Medical Arts Building. After relocating to Houston, Mrs. Charlotte Flynn served as secretary of the board for the Maternal Health Center, Inc., an affiliate of the Birth Control Federation of America, which was founded in 1921, and later renamed the Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942, by activist and educator Margaret Sanger.

The Dr. & Mrs. James G. Flynn House at 2129 Brentwood Drive qualifies for Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 4 and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the early 1920s, philanthropist and arts patron Ima Hogg introduced Houston architects John Staub and Birdsall P. Briscoe to the Spanish Creole designs of the French Quarter in New Orleans. The trio traveled to the Crescent City to study architecture and the use of ornamental ironwork in construction. While there, Staub bought scrap cast iron to integrate into his River Oaks home designs.

The first River Oaks house advertised as “Latin Colonial,” as Staub dubbed the style, was built in 1924 at 3374 Chevy Chase Drive and modeled after the 1806 Absinthe House in the French Quarter. As in his other Latin Colonial works, Staub incorporated a hipped roof, cast-iron railings that formed a shallow balcony, and the use of stucco walls painted in pale apricot with dark blue-green shutters.

On May 2, 1927, “Additional Reservations, Restrictions and Covenants in River Oaks” were filed with the Harris County Clerk for River Oaks Section 3. Stipulations included the requirement that all houses

be two stories tall. Section 3 was advertised, “Live in a Park . . . Ride Home over a Parkway Drive.” In December 1929, Houston surgeon James G. Flynn awarded builder Charles M.L. West the contract to construct the house at 2129 Brentwood Drive in River Oaks Section 3 for \$13,000. Architect Charles S. Chase combined features from Staub’s Latin Colonial designs into the house he created for Dr. and Mrs. Flynn, although Chase and Dr. Flynn told the *Houston Post* that the home’s character was “Creole.”

Coincidentally, all of the home’s earliest owners were physicians.

Dr. James G. Flynn

James Graham Flynn (1885-1957) was born in Galveston, Texas, and spent more than half his life in the Island City. He entered the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 1905 and trained as a surgeon. According to the U.S. Census, he was married to Charlotte Robertson of Shreveport, Louisiana, before 1910; at the time of the census, the couple had a one-year-old son, J. Graham Flynn, Jr. Dr. Flynn enlisted in the Army Medical Corps and served from 1916 to 1919, when he was honorably discharged as a major and began working to re-establish his practice in Galveston. The Flynns moved to Houston in 1927, where Dr. Flynn opened an office in the downtown Medical Arts Building (demolished). The couple built the house at 2129 Brentwood Drive in 1930 and lived there until 1946. The Flynns sold the house to Dr. Clarence P. Harris, a physician who also had an office in the Medical Arts Building, and his wife Jessie. The Flynns moved to 635 Saddlewood Lane (demolished). The Harris family occupied the house on Brentwood Drive from 1946 to 1958.

Mrs. Charlotte R. Flynn

Born Charlotte Robertson (1889-1964) in Shreveport, Louisiana, Mrs. James G. Flynn was active in a variety of areas while her husband was busy with his practice in Galveston. In addition to being a member of the ladies’ auxiliary of the Galveston County Medical Society, Mrs. Flynn worked as employment secretary for the local Y.W.C.A. finding suitable jobs for young women and traveling around the state giving health lectures. When her husband became a member of Galveston’s Argonne Post of the American Legion, Charlotte Flynn joined the women’s auxiliary and became one of the first women in Texas to sit on the directorate of an American Legion post. After the Flynns relocated to Houston, Mrs. Flynn served as secretary of the board for the Maternal Health Center, Inc., an affiliate of the Birth Control Federation of America, which was founded in 1921 as the American Birth Control League by activist and educator Margaret Sanger. In 1939, Mrs. William Lupe, Jr., president of the San Antonio Maternal Health Center, explained to the *San Antonio Light* that the organization was established “to help women who can’t pay for it space their children apart” allowing the mothers to regain their strength and produce healthier babies. The Birth Control Federation of America was renamed the Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942.

Dr. Elizabeth Balas Powell

Born in Innsbruck, Austria-Hungary, as Elizabeth Balas (1914-2007), the future Dr. Powell lost her father in World War I after which her mother, a microbiologist, moved the family to the United States. Elizabeth Balas graduated with honors from the University of Pittsburgh and contemplated studying nursing until her grandmother suggested she become a physician. While serving as a pathology intern at Duke University Medical School, she met and married Dr. Norberne B. Powell (1914-2002), another intern. After Dr. Elizabeth Powell became the second woman to graduate from the Duke medical school, she and her husband moved to Houston, where she served as chief of pathology at Memorial Baptist

Hospital throughout World War II. She began teaching at Baylor College of Medicine after the war and retired in the 1970s. Dr. Elizabeth Powell and her husband lived at 2129 Brentwood Drive from 1960 to 1967.

Charles S. Chase, AIA

Charles S. Chase, AIA, (1893-1990), sometimes listed as Charles S. Chase, Jr. or Charles S. Chase III, was born in Chicago and studied architecture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn from 1911 to 1915. He then spent two years in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Chase returned to the United States in 1917 and served as a first lieutenant in the Aviation Section of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, the predecessor of today's U.S. Air Force. During World War I, he was assigned to Ellington Field outside of Houston, where he acted as a flight instructor and accident investigator.

Before starting his own practice, Chase was an associate partner of prominent architect Joseph Finger from 1926 to 1929. In 1931, a year after he designed the Dr. & Mrs. James G. Flynn House on Brentwood Drive in River Oaks, Chase worked for the Belmain Company, the successor firm to the Braeswood Corporation in developing what is now the Old Braeswood subdivision. In 1931, he designed a home advertised as the "Belmain Mediterranean"; the stucco-covered, tile-roofed residence is at 2315 Glen Haven Boulevard in Old Braeswood.

From 1933 to 1937, during the Great Depression, Chase was employed as district engineer for the Works Progress Administration in Austin before returning to private practice in Houston. In his biographical entry in the American Architects Directory of 1970, Chase cited his work with Kenneth Franzheim on the 1958 expansion of Houston's landmark Texas Co. Building as one of his most significant projects. The 16-story Texaco annex stands at 1111 Rusk at Fannin in downtown Houston; the 1958 annex, a 1936 expansion and the original 1915 Texas Co. Building are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Chase retired in 1966 and died in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1990.

James M.L. West

According to the *Texas General Contractors Association Bulletin*, Dr. James G. Flynn awarded the \$13,000 contract to construct his house at 2129 Brentwood Drive to building contractor James M.L. West (1869-1966) in December 1929. West, a Scottish immigrant, arrived in Houston in 1901 and became a naturalized citizen in 1907. According to the City of Houston Landmark Designation Report for the William T. Campbell House, West was the contractor for that home at 3237 Inwood Drive in River Oaks. The Campbell House was designed by Birdsall T. Briscoe, constructed by James M.L. West in 1925 and designated a City of Houston Landmark in 2009.

River Oaks

River Oaks is adjacent to Buffalo Bayou and Memorial Park in west central Houston. The residential garden suburb, which comprises 1,100 acres, was developed starting in the 1920s through the foresight and persistence of brothers Will Hogg (1875-1930) and Mike Hogg (1885-1941) and attorney Hugh Potter (1888-1968).

The nucleus of the expansive subdivision predates the Hoggs' and Potter's involvement. By 1924, Country Club Estates, the section south of the newly established River Oaks Country Club, had been

platted, but not developed. The Hogg brothers bought out the original investors, including James West associate Judge J.A. Platt, and established Country Club Estates, Inc., later the River Oaks Corporation.

Mike Hogg's friend, Hugh Potter, was installed as president of the corporation. Under his expert direction, the development of River Oaks began in earnest. Not only was the existing section developed, the corporation also busily acquired land on all sides of the original Country Club Estates. Between 1926 and 1947, an additional 19 platted subdivisions were joined to River Oaks.

A study of noteworthy American suburban communities, particularly Roland Park in Baltimore and the Country Club District in Kansas City, was responsible for such innovative ideas as the institution of architectural controls in River Oaks, the levying of a private tax to support a maintenance and services fund, and the creation of a property owners' association to enforce deed restrictions.

Will Hogg was especially determined that River Oaks serve as a model of enlightened community planning standards for Houston. He retained Kansas City landscape architects Hare & Hare to provide a master plan that would protect the environmental integrity and natural beauty of the area. The developers also hired J.C. Nichols, who built Kansas City's Country Club Plaza, one of the first major shopping centers in the United States, to serve as a design consultant.

The River Oaks master plan included home sites, a fifteen-acre campus for River Oaks Elementary School (1926, Harry D. Payne), two shopping centers, and esplanades planted with flowers. The plan called for underground utility lines, eliminated alleys, allowed only three intersecting streets and provided rigid building codes. Deed restrictions and centralized community control assured exclusivity; approval of house designs by a panel of architects and citizens and a purchase price of at least \$7,000 were required. A "gentleman's agreement" excluded blacks, Jews and other minorities.

The first home in the area predates River Oaks; the William L. Clayton Summer Home, 3376 Inwood Drive (1924, Birdsall P. Briscoe), is now a City of Houston Protected Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Among the other notable houses in the subdivision is philanthropist and arts patron Ima Hogg's estate, Bayou Bend, (1928, John F. Staub with Birdsall P. Briscoe), which is a City of Houston Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. To date, more than 100 River Oaks houses have been designated as City of Houston Landmarks through the joint efforts of Preservation River Oaks and Preservation Houston.

River Oaks operated independently for three years before it was annexed by the City of Houston. In the late 1920s, the development lost money, but by the late 1930s developers had invested \$3 million in the project and River Oaks had begun to influence development patterns in the rest of the city.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The two-story River Oaks Latin Colonial style house faces north on a grassy lot at 2129 Brentwood Drive. The house is covered in stucco and has a symmetrical fenestration plan on the front (north) façade. The house is five bays wide.

The first and second bays on the first floor each contain one set of French doors. Each pair of doors contains 20 lights. There is a set of functional, full-length louvered shutters on each set of doors.

The third (central) bay contains a shallow arched opening with a contemporary door. The door has ten lights with five-light sidelights on either side. The porch lights on either side of the doorway have top brackets that match those supporting the second floor balcony and balconettes.

The first floor of the fourth and fifth bays matches the first floor of the first and second bays of the house.

The first bay on the second floor contains one six-over-six sash window placed directly above the first floor French doors. The window has a set of functional, louvered shutters. A cast iron balconette is below the window. The balconette contains two lace end panels and a lotus-pattern balustrade. The balconette is supported by two pairs of spiral brackets.

The second, third and fourth bays contain a shallow, flat-roofed cast iron balcony. The balcony has a lace frieze and four symmetrically spaced lace columns with lace corner brackets. There is a lotus-pattern balustrade between the columns in the balcony's second, third and fourth bays. The balcony is supported by four pairs of symmetrically spaced spiral brackets.

The second bay on the second floor contains one window behind Bahama/Bermuda shutters hinged at the top of the window. The third bay on the second floor contains two windows behind Bahama/Bermuda shutters.

The fourth bay matches the second bay on the second floor and the fifth bay matches the first bay on the second floor.

The house has a shingled, hipped roof with slightly flared eaves. There is guttering around the edge of the roofline and downspouts on the first and fifth bays. There is a rectangular, stucco-covered interior chimney with metal hood on the east end of the house.

Alterations

According to the Harris County Building Assessment Records, an enclosed porch was constructed at the rear of the home in 1931 when the Flynn's had been in the house about one year, and the assessment records indicate the home was remodeled in 1938. The next major improvement recorded by the county was the installation of air conditioning by Dr. Harris in 1954. Five years later, the county inspector reported that Dr. Powell had remodeled the house and added a second story to the enclosed porch. The 1966 tax records note that Dr. Elizabeth Powell had remodeled the interior. The home was extensively remodeled again in the late 1980s under the ownership of Robert and Katharine Devlin; Robert Devlin was president and CEO of American General Life. At that time, the foundation was extended ten feet to the south and the main house was connected to the servant's quarters with a breezeway/patio.

The later work also included the installation of French doors with functional, louvered shutters on the first floor of the front façade and the addition of Bahama/Bermuda shutters that are hinged at the top of the windows on the second floor.

The current owners purchased the property in 2014 and embarked on a comprehensive interior remodeling, but the only exterior change in 2015 was the replacement of the neoclassical front door ensemble with a contemporary ten-light door with five-light sidelights.

The house is in excellent condition.

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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 | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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 Dr. & Mrs. James G. Flynn House at 2129 Brentwood Drive.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Dr. & Mrs. James G. Flynn House at 2129 Brentwood Drive.

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS
DR. & MRS. JAMES G. FLYNN HOUSE
2129 BRENTWOOD DRIVE



2129 Brentwood Drive, River Oaks Section 3, Houston, Harris County, Texas. August 2015. Photo by David Bush, Preservation Houston.

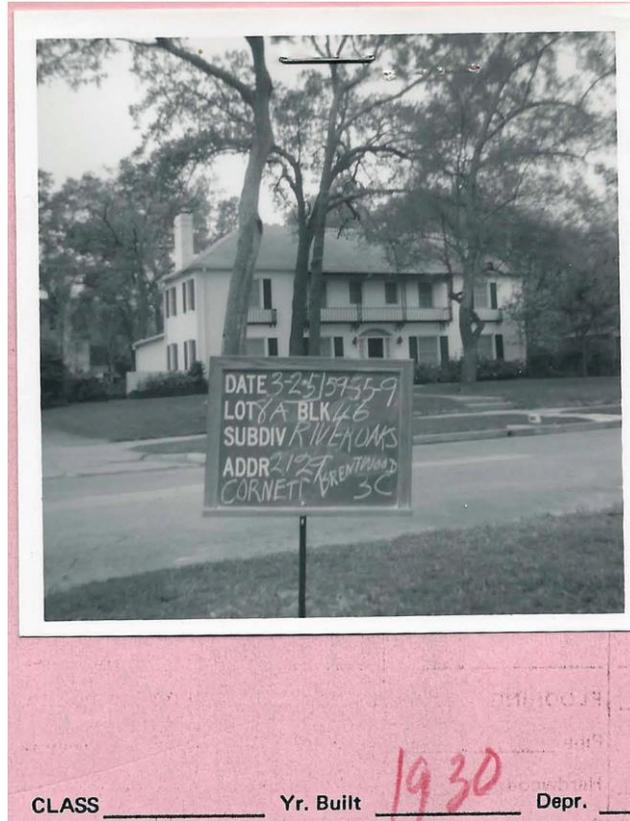
EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS
DR. & MRS. JAMES G. FLYNN HOUSE
2129 BRENTWOOD DRIVE



2129 Brentwood Drive, April 2015. Photo courtesy Courtney Toomey.

**EXHIBIT B
HISTORIC PHOTO**

**DR. & MRS. JAMES G. FLYNN HOUSE
2129 BRENTWOOD DRIVE**

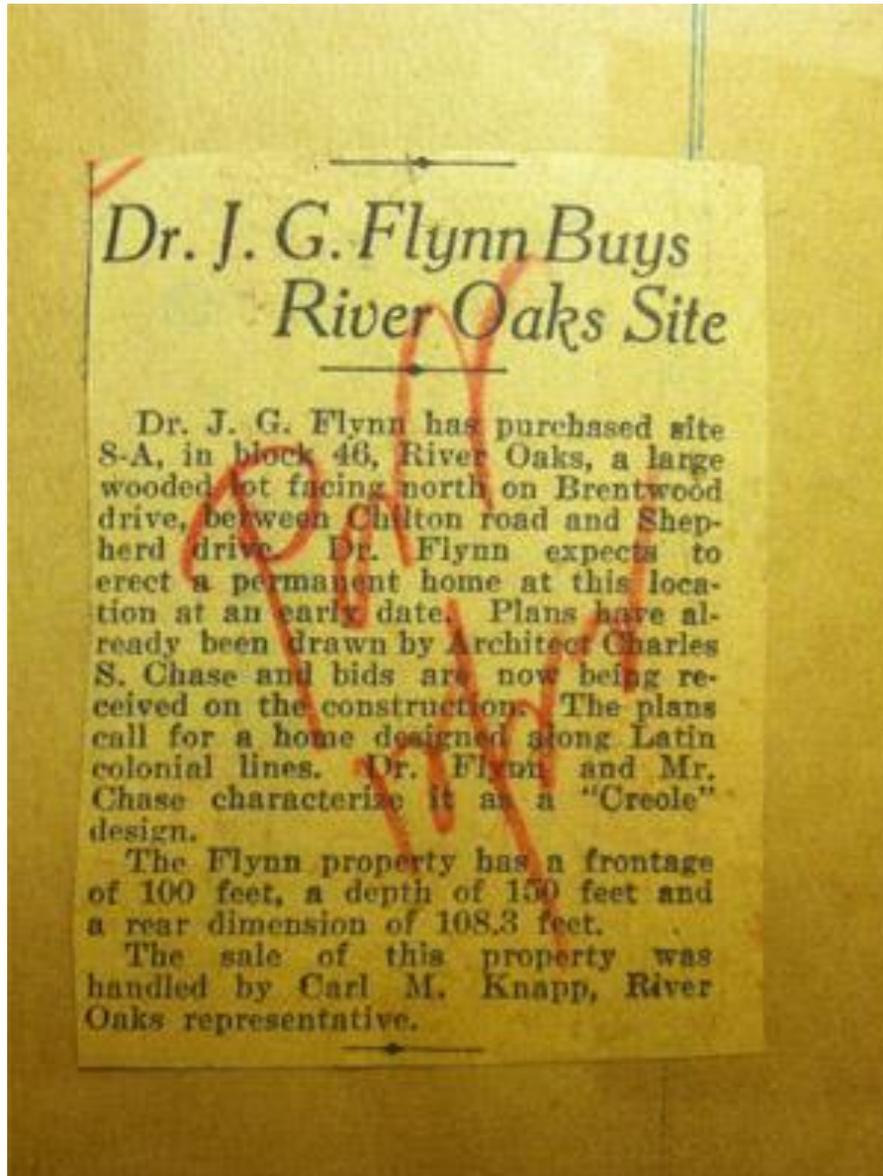


Historic photo of 2129 Brentwood Drive taken after 1938, when the Flynn's remodeled the house, and before 1959, when the Powells added a second floor to the rear addition. Harris County Building Assessment photo and reports, 1938 through 1970, Harris County Archives.

EXHIBIT B

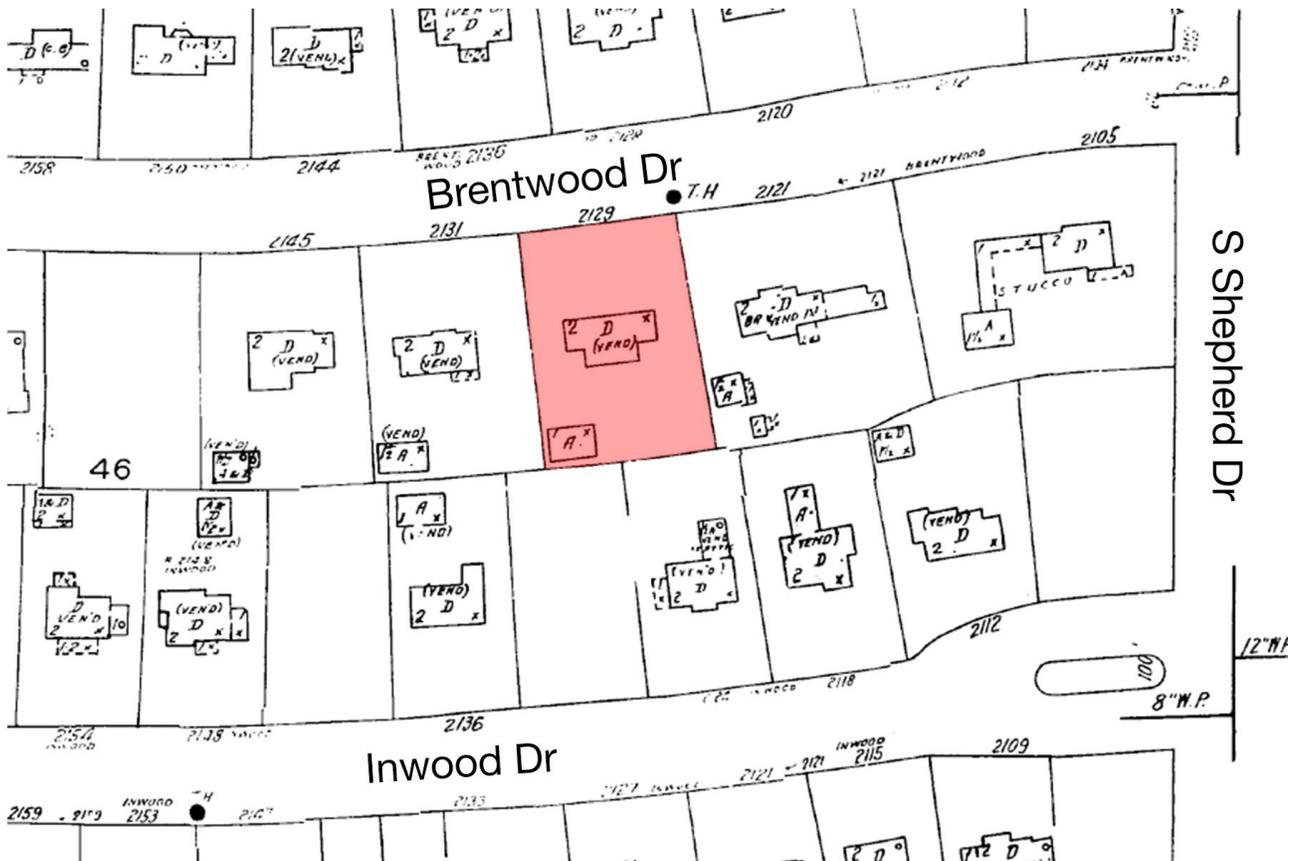
HISTORIC PHOTO

DR. & MRS. JAMES G. FLYNN HOUSE
2129 BRENTWOOD DRIVE



Houston Post, December 22, 1929. River Oaks Scrapbooks, 1929-1930. Houston Metropolitan Research Center

EXHIBIT C
SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP
DR. & MRS. JAMES G. FLYNN HOUSE
2129 BRENTWOOD DRIVE



Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Volume 11, Sheet 1105, dated September 1934. Houston Metropolitan Research Center

EXHIBIT D
SITE LOCATION MAP
DR. & MRS. JAMES G. FLYNN HOUSE
2129 BRENTWOOD DRIVE

