

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: The Martin L. and Susie Weber House
OWNER: Mr. Clarence Bagby and Mr. Ronald Gross
APPLICANT: Mr. Clarence Bagby and Mr. Ronald Gross
LOCATION: 2003 Kane Street - Old Sixth Ward Historic District
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: 06/15/97

AGENDA ITEM: II
PC MEETING DATE: 08/07/97
HPO FILE NO.: 97L022
DATE ACCEPTED: 06/11/97
HAHC HEARING DATE: 07/17/97

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 7, Block 416 of the W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, being a 50' X 100' parcel, consisting of 5,000 square feet. The building on the site, which faces Kane Street, is a one-story, wood frame residence with a porch in the ell of the building. A one-story addition, with an entry door facing White Street, is attached to the east side of the building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The property is contained within the boundary of the Old Sixth Ward Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 23, 1978 (Reference No. 78002946). An application for historic district designation by the City of Houston was initiated in accordance with the Historic Preservation Ordinance No. 95-228 by action of the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) at their public hearing on March 13, 1997. The application for historic district designation is pending action of the HAHC. Even though said application for historic district designation is pending, the owner of 2003 Kane Street, located in the proposed historic district, wished to initiate an individual landmark designation application for his property. The applicant also plans to secure a certificate of appropriateness (COA) for restoration work and therefore, qualify to apply for the Tax Exemption offered by the City of Houston. The house is classified as "potentially contributing" in the inventory of the pending application for historic district designation by the City of Houston. The applicant plans in the near future to request a COA to address the inappropriate alterations which resulted in the "potentially contributing" classification. At such time as the COA for the restoration is approved and work is completed, the building will be classified as "contributing."

When the Houston and Texas Central Railway and their related railroad shops were located on Washington Avenue, the Old Sixth Ward did not exist. The railroad, however, was the reason why large numbers of immigrants and craftsmen came to the area to seek employment with the railroad. These immigrant laborers were in high demand by the rapidly expanding railroads. Not only was this "workforce" necessary for the growth of that industry, which resulted in Houston becoming the major transportation center in the southwest, but the railroads created the opportunity for large numbers of immigrants to come to Houston and settle. They not only brought their determination to succeed, but also they brought their craftsmanship which was expressed in the construction of many of the neighborhood houses. These "working class" residents of the Old Sixth Ward, for the most part, constructed modest, one-story, frame cottages on the lots they purchased. Or they rented small cottages owned by wealthier residents or investors there.

Because houses in the Sixth Ward were constructed by laborers or by investors as rental property for laborers, they were small. Also, the exterior of the homes were usually not decorated elaborately. The majority of the homes were constructed in the era when elaborate, ready-cut millwork was very accessible due to the industrial

revolution and the technology it produced. Since the millwork was so expensive, however, it was not affordable for the many laborers who lived in the Old Sixth Ward. Therefore, if a resident desired these architectural elements on his own home, he frequently made them himself from his own patterns which also showed an influence of his craftsmanship or his country of origin. One of the most unusual types of brackets, seen in the Sixth Ward, was a bird pattern, believed to be German in origin and developed from a Germanic folk symbol (distel finke, which means "little finch" in German). Beyond the architectural elements that are distinguished in the district, the Old Sixth Ward has been noted for its ethnic diversity. Beginning with a wave of German immigrants in the 1870's, the neighborhood has been at various times the home for Swedish, German, English, Irish, French, Swiss, Italian, Polish and Mexicans. Because the area tended to attract immigrant workers for the railroad, the district residents have come from a variety of national backgrounds.

The type of house found in the neighborhood also represents an important era of middle-class housing for German immigrants whose architectural craftsmanship contributes uniquely to the historical significance of the Old Sixth Ward Historic District. One such house, which is the product of a German immigrant, is the house at 2003 Kane Street. It is a unique example of an L-plan cottage with influences of the Queen Anne style. The architectural significance of the house is enhanced because it is the only remaining cottage in the Old Sixth Ward with its ornamental, Eastlake type millwork intact which was made by one of the local German carpenters. Another unique characteristic of the building is that the porch is located under the main roof of the house. The building is also unique due to the fact that it served a dual purpose being not only a residence but a "cornerstore" as well. The one-story addition on the east elevation of the house which faces White Street, was used as a small, family operated business. It was typical in the neighborhood for small businesses to be located on corners and mixed among the residences. They served a useful purpose because people needed to shop daily in stores located close to home. Residents of the neighborhood usually did not own a horse and wagon or even an automobile and usually had to walk from their homes to shop or to go to work.

The success of the railroad influenced the growth of the Fourth Ward so drastically that it was necessary for the creation of a new ward. On January 1, 1876, the (Old) Sixth Ward was created from the northern portion of the Fourth Ward. The (Old) Sixth Ward today has the highest concentration of Victorian-era buildings in Houston. Together with its mid-19th and early 20th century architecture, it represents the oldest intact neighborhood in the city. Even today, the area maintains the feeling of a modest, self-contained neighborhood with its predominantly small 19th-century, one-story cottages, two-story Victorian-era homes, and some early 20th-century bungalow style buildings. The neighborhood also contains fire stations, churches, corner stores, and a school. The original boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward extended further south to Buffalo Bayou and streets including Nelson, Richmond, and Bow were platted for houses which were destroyed or moved when Memorial Drive was constructed.

The man most responsible for the present appearance of the Old Sixth Ward is William R. Baker, one of Houston's earliest settlers. He began buying land in the area as early as 1839 and by 1858, he and his associates owned all of the area. He served as Harris county clerk and later as a mayor of Houston (1880-1888). He lived at 1410 Rusk Avenue in the fashionable area of Houston. He was also President of the Houston and Texas Central Railway for many years. The development of Baker's addition coincided closely with the development of his railway. Its route, authorized by the state legislature in 1856, approached Houston from the northwest. His addition was intended to attract the immigrant families working on the Houston and Texas Central Railway, and the railroad's success greatly influenced the growth of the neighborhood. The railroad was the first one to resume building after the Civil War, and it continued successfully, finally reaching Denison, Texas in 1873. This terminus connected the line with the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway and gave the state its first through line to St. Louis.

The 1870 Census reveals that everyone living in the area either worked for the railroad or provided services for those who did. By the 1880s, Houston had be transformed into a hub for railways in southeastern Texas. With the first deepening of Buffalo Bayou for shipping in 1875, the water traffic connected to the railroads made Houston a commercial rival of Galveston, the largest city in Texas at the time. Again in 1908, the ship channel was deepened. After the twenty-five-foot-deep Houston Ship Channel opened on November 10, 1914, Houston could not be stopped from becoming not only one of the largest commercial ports in the world but also the major U. S. business center with 17 connecting railroads to all parts of the country.

The men who came to work on the railroad first lived in boarding houses along Washington Avenue and many later bought land in the neighborhood. Not only was the area occupied by railroad workers, bricklayers and carpenters, but also living there were druggists, clerks, tailors, doctors, bakers, printers, attorneys and merchants. By 1887, there were so many businesses along Washington Avenue, that the area became known as the "up town" business community, as opposed to Market Square which was known as "downtown."

It is important to tell the individual story of the owners and tenants of the house at 2003 Kane Street because it echoes the stories of other early immigrant workers who settled in the area. The site of the house (Lot 7) and Lot 8 were purchased by Martin Louis Weber, and wife, Susie in 1887 from Benjamin A. Reisner for \$550. Reisner owned a carriage and wagon manufacturing concern, which also did blacksmithing and manufacturing of iron and steel for jail cells. He was also agent for Tennessee wagons with offices at 13-15 Commerce Street (between Travis and Milam). He resided at 3 Union Street, between White and Henderson Streets in Old Sixth Ward. Shortly after purchasing the lots from Reisner, the Webers built their home on Lot 7. Mr. Weber was a painter in the shops of the Henderson and Texas Central Railroad (H & T. C. Ry.) and lived there until 1905. Their son, Martin Louis Weber, Jr. was a clerk with P. G. Houston according to the Houston City Directory for 1905. That was the year the Webers sold their home to Albertina Koch for \$1,650. According to the City Directory of 1907, Albertina Koch was the widow of Joseph Koch and lived at 2217 Decatur. The Webers moved to Houston Heights and resided at 926 Allston according to the city directory.

Apparently the house at 2003 Kane was purchased for use as rental property by Mrs. Koch. In the 1908-09 City Directory, James R. Pruett was residing there. He was a clerk auditor (pass. accts.) in the office of G.H. & S.A. Railroad. In 1910-1911, Nora Mahoney, widow of John M. Mahoney, was residing at 2003 Kane. Previously, the Mahoneys had been residing at 1813 Lubbock.

In August, 1912, Anna Vollmer, formerly Stuer, joined by her husband, William Vollmer, and Alvina Neuen, formerly Stuer, joined by her husband, August Neuen, all of Harris County, sold the house for \$5.00 to Helena Detering, sometimes called, Lena Detering, wife of H. E. Detering, out of her separate estate and for the purpose of partition. H. E. Detering appeared in the 1905-06 city directory as owning a grocery, feed and broom manufacturing company at 3028 Washington. He resided at that address as did, Herman H. Detering, who clerked in the store. Anna Vollmer, Helena Detering and Alvina Neuen were the only children of Albertina Stuer. Since there are no deed records indicating a transfer of title of the property by Albertina Koch to the Vollmers or Neuens, it might be assumed that Albertina either remarried (name changed to Koch) or upon her death, the property was transferred by probate action to the Vollmers and Neuens. In the 1910-11 city directory, a Miss Lenora Neuen was living at 2217 Decatur, former home of Albertina Koch. No record of the Vollmers or other Neuens was found after checking city directory listings.

The heirs of Mrs. Koch continued to use the house for rental property until May 1913, when Lena and H. E. Detering sold the house for \$3000 to Nora Mahoney who was the tenant. Also living with Nora Mahoney at 2003 Kane was her son, Richard J. Mahoney. At the time of the sale of the home, Richard J. Mahoney was a

clerk with Houston Gas Company. Formerly, he had worked at the H. & T. C. Railroad. In 1915 Richard Mahoney was employed as a car filler with Pintsch Gas Company. In 1917, he was the assistant foreman with Houston Gas & Fuel Company. In 1919 he was working as a pipe fitter with the Southern Pacific Railway shops. Apparently Richard Mahoney married about 1921 because it was about that time that the house at 2003 Kane was enlarged with an addition facing White Street. According to the city directory of 1922, Richard Mahoney and wife, Emily were residing with Nora Mahoney at 2003 Kane. Mr. Mahoney was a city fireman at that time.

Mrs. Mahoney must have died about 1923 because she is not listed in the city directory and her son, Richard J. Mahoney, was living at 1005 Bonner. Also that year, Louis and Henrietta Ruffel were residing as tenants at 2003 Kane Street. They also owned a grocery store at 711 White Street, which was the site of the addition on the house facing White Street. In 1926, Richard Mahoney was again living at 2003 Kane. He was employed as an auto mechanic with Joe Isaac Company. His brother, J. M. Mahoney, was also residing there. The grocery store at 711 White Street was operated by Mrs. Alice Brannan, widow of V. I. Brannan.

An affidavit filed in March, 1926 by Richard J. Mahoney stated that Nora Mahoney was his mother and that she had three sons, John M., Ed M. and Richard J. Mahoney. It further stated that she had no other children, that she died intestate and that Ed conveyed his interest to his two brothers on September 24, 1923 for one dollar. On that same day in 1926, John M. Mahoney, unmarried, Richard Mahoney and wife, Emily, sold the house for \$4500 to F. H. Flanagan and J. C. Huston who used the house at 2003 Kane to produce rental income. In 1927 Mrs. Ione Smith was operating a confectionery at 711 White Street and was residing as a tenant at 2003 Kane. In 1928 Steve and Angeline Colletta were residing at 2003 Kane. He was a salesman for Texas Bread Company. J. H. Anthony was listed at 711 White with Mrs. Effie Anthony operating a grocery business there. There was no listing for 711 White Street for several years but a tenant was living at 2003 Kane Street, namely, Mrs. Sarah E. Palmer (widow of Asa A.) according to the 1929-1930 city directory. On January 15, 1930 J. C. Huston and Fred H. Flanagan sold the house for \$4000 to David Lewis. J. C. Huston owned Huston's Pharmacy which first appears in the city directory in 1923-24 at 2101 Washington. Incidentally, it is the oldest drugstore and soda fountain business currently operating in Houston today.

In the 1931-32 city directory, Jacob and Rebecca Stark were residing there as tenants. The house continued to be used as rental property by the Lewis family until it was sold in August 1996 to the applicants, who will occupy and use the house as a single family home.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The building at 2003 Kane Street is described as a one-story, wood frame cottage with a gable end roof intersected by a prominent front-facing gable roof. The type of the building is an L-plan cottage which exhibits influences of the Queen Anne style. The most prominent features of the house include the front-facing gable which is clad with decorative wood shingles and box bay. The gables exhibit decorative, scrollwork gable ornaments. The porch is located in the ell of the house and is located under the main roof of the building. The porch features turned columns, elaborate, lace-like brackets placed on either sides at the top of each column, and saw-tooth frieze between brackets. The single entry door is located in the porch ell facing Kane Street. Above the door is a transom window. The current main entry door is a four panel, wood door. The door has been most likely replaced at an earlier time but with a compatible door. The original entry door probably was a Queen Anne style cottage door. It would have featured a large, upper glass with multi-lights below which were wood panels and applied Eastlake ornamentation. The windows are wood sash, double-hung with 2/2 lights. The roof is clad with composition shingles. There are original brick sidewalks on the north and east sides of the property.

Only minor changes have been made to the main building since its original construction in 1887. The minor alterations include the replacement of the original balustrade with a less authentic but compatible one. Also wooden window hoods have been placed in the center of existing windows for shading window from sun while windows are open. The applicants plan to apply for a certificate of appropriateness to restore the house completely, including the removal of the two alterations mentioned previously. According to the applicant, about 1920 an 18' X 19' room addition was added to the east elevation facing White Street. The addition exhibits a gable-end roof and windows, doors and siding that are comparable with the main house. The addition appears to have added to the main house to be used by the residents as a small, family operated business, which was not only typical but a necessity in the neighborhood. The address of the business was 711 White Street according to city directories.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION.....:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, 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 D NA

S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

- (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;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on July 17, 1997, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission determined that the application complied with criteria found in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and recommended that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the HAHC and forward it to City Council for the designation of the Martin L. and Susie Weber House as a landmark to the Planning Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: That the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and forward it to City Council for designation of the Martin L. and Susie Weber House as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

Site Location Map
The Martin L. and Susie Weber House
2003 Kane Street
Not to scale



