

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Houston Fire Station No. 7  
(Houston Fire Museum, Inc.)

**OWNER:** City of Houston Fire Department

**APPLICANT:** Houston Fire Museum, Inc.

**LOCATION:** 2403 Milam

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** Oct-19-97

**AGENDA ITEM:** IIB

**P.C. MEETING DATE:** Dec-11-97

**HPO FILE NO.:** 97L041

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Oct-10-97

**HAHC HEARING DATE:** 11-20-97

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 6 and 7, Block 1, Hadley Home Reserve, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story brick and concrete building with paired fire engine portals flanking an arched central entry.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Fire Station No. 7 was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on April 17, 1986 (Reference No. 86000798). It was also designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1988. Fire Station No. 7 was designed in 1898 by Olle J. Lorehn (1864-1939), one of Houston's most well known turn-of-the-century architects. He was commissioned to design several other stations including the old Central Fire Station (demolished) in downtown Houston in 1903 and Fire Station No. 9 (demolished) in 1899. The rock-faced, cast concrete surfaces and open stone, stick-like parapets were a specialty of the Swedish-born architect. Another building that still exists and exhibits these characteristics is the George W. Bergstrom Grocery Store (c.1905) at 2102 Hardy. Although it is not documented as a Lorehn building, the Dickson Building (1894) at 112 Travis strongly exhibits these same characteristics. Other buildings that are extant which were designed by Lorehn include Sacred Heart Catholic Church (1911-12) at 1111 Pierce, the James Bute Company Warehouse (1910) at 701-711 William Street, the Metropole Hotel (1911) at 1605 Preston, Nabisco Production Plant Building (1902) at 3 North Chenevert Street, and the W. T. Carter, Jr. House (1912) at 18 Courtlandt Place (with Birdsall P. Briscoe). Another important building designed by Lorehn was the Binz Building at 513-19 Main (demolished in 1950). This building was the first tall office building in Houston. When it was completed in 1895, Lorehn secured his reputation as a capable and imaginative architect.

Fire Station No. 7 is the only fire station remaining of Lorehn's work. The architectural style of this fire station is Lorehn's own interpretation of the Romanesque style of the Victorian-era period. The building is a fine example of the many turn-of-the-century fire stations that were built in Houston. Because of its restoration and use as a public museum, Fire Station No. 7 is even more important not only for its architectural significance but also for the educational resource it provides to the community about the fire department.

Lot 6, Block 1 of the Hadley Home Reserve Addition was purchased by the City of Houston from the estate of S. B. Moore for \$850 on February 14, 1898. City records show that bids from seven contractors were received for the construction of the new fire house. The \$3,821.30 bid by Cahill & Hunter was accepted by the Board of Public Works on August 15, 1898.

In the 1890's, the south end of Houston experienced substantial growth in residential development. Fire Station No. 7, located near the Fairground Addition, was platted in 1891 on the site of the old city fairgrounds and

racetrack. However, the area of fire protection which this station serviced was a large one which included many important institutional buildings as well as the densely populated residential subdivisions surrounding it. The buildings of the Rice Institute, Museum of Fine Arts, South End Junior High (as well as many other school buildings) and churches, such as Trinity Episcopal, were all within the service area of this fire station.

The station was in active service for 69 years, probably the longest of any Houston fire station. The fire station was updated as necessary through the years, but no significant alterations were made.

In July of 1980, Houston Fire Museum, Inc., was recognized by the State of Texas as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. In addition to developing the museum collection in 1982 (open to the public) and providing tours, the Board of Directors is responsible for the preservation and operation of the building which is owned by the City of Houston. In 1981, 1994 and 1997 a series of sympathetic undertakings were made to restore the building. The building was the recipient of a Good Brick Award by the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance in 1997 for its restoration endeavor.

### **RESTORATION HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION**

Carefully and authentically restored to house the Houston Fire Museum, this Victorian-era Romanesque style building is distinguished by its heavy massing, rusticated trim and bold stone detailing. Many original architectural details remain intact such as some colored "art glass" windowpanes, interior wood paneling and two brass fireman's poles. Fire Station No. 7 is a two-story, rectangular building measuring 75 feet wide and 35 feet deep with a one story addition in the rear. Load bearing brick walls, now stuccoed and painted a burgundy red (original color of the brick), are trimmed with rusticated concrete at the base of the building and rough-cut stone surrounding windows and entrances. Five bays on the principal facade create an ABCBA rhythm. The flat roof is defined by open balustrade parapets over the second and fourth bays which project slightly. These bays are filled on the first floor with wide vehicular entrances with paneled wooden garage doors. The number "7" appears in the rectangular stone surround over the center of each door. Above each entry, triple wood-framed 1/1 double-sash windows with transoms appear. In the last bay, the original "art-glass" transom remains. Brickwork at the roofline over the central bay repeats the parapet balustrade pattern. Below a stone panel are the words "Fire-Dept" which surmounts three, wide segmental arched hoods over three sash windows. The pedestrian entrance on the first floor is defined by a rounded arched aperture. The north and south elevations are identical. A triple window in each story is flanked by a single window with the same trim and configuration as the main facade. The first floor window has some multi-paned "art-glass" as seen in the main facade. At the rear, the "skylight" is expressed with a higher roofline in the center. Two windows are contained within this projection above a line of second story windows. On the first floor at the rear, there is a stuccoed, one-story addition with a flat roof which is unremarkable.

At some time, probably during the 1940s, the central pedestrian doorway on the main facade was widened and converted to a vehicle exit for the Chief's car. The metal, framed glass doors in this bay today are not original but adapted for its use as a museum entrance. The old 4-part, wood folding doors with upper glass lights were retained and incorporated behind the new door. A one-story addition was also appended to the rear, and the entire brick portion of the exterior was stuccoed. The building underwent a complete restoration between 1981 and 1997. At that time a new doorway was incorporated into the central bay off the main facade, but the old 4-part wooden hinged door with glass lights has been retained behind it. At present the building is maintained in excellent condition.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## 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 November 20, 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 Houston Fire Station No. 7 (Houston Fire Museum, Inc.) as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

**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 Houston Fire Station No. 7 (Houston Fire Museum, Inc.) as a Landmark of the City of Houston.

