

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Dow School

Owner: Houston Independent School District

APPLICANT: Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission

LOCATION: 1900 Kane Street (aka 1901 Kane)

HEARING NOTICE: Jan-26-2003

AGENDA ITEM: V

P.C. Meeting Date: Apr-17-2003

HPO FILE NO.: 03L106

DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-16-2003

HAHC HEARING: Apr-10-2003

SITE INFORMATION

1.0202 acres of land, being all of Unrestricted Reserve "A", Block One (1), DOW SCHOOL BLOCK SUBDIVISION, duly recorded in Film Code No. 547159 of the Map Records of Harris County, Texas, and being only one parcel of the same land formerly known as Lots 1 through 12, Block 428, North Side Buffalo Bayou (N.S.B.B.), W.R. Baker Addition, in the John Austin Survey, A-1, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a high raised, 2-story, masonry brick institutional building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Dow School was constructed in 1912 in the Sixth Ward (Old Sixth Ward) of Houston on Kane Street to serve the educational needs of that community. Dow School was also a pioneer in the field of special education for mentally retarded children. The building was designed by C. H. Page of Page & Brother Architect of Austin, Texas. The Arts and Crafts-inspired design of the building is the only remaining example of that type for a school building in Houston, and Dow School is one of the oldest public schools in Houston. Its current site, occupying the entire block facing Kane Street, is actually its third building location, although the school district had purchased the block as early as 1876. When the Houston Public School superintendent, Justin E. Dow, died in 1887, the name of the school, then located at 1600 Washington and called "Washington Street School", was changed to Dow School as a memorial to Mr. Dow. In 1926 the original 16-room school building was enlarged and expanded (facing Lubbock Street) with additions in keeping with the original design of the building, thus increasing the building to 28 rooms. Today, the school building serves as the headquarters for Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA), which provides arts education as well as educational and behavioral counseling to the youth of Houston. Also, Dow School is the oldest school building in Houston still open to the public.

Dow School is located west of downtown Houston in the 1900 Block of Kane in the heart of the Old Sixth Ward, a political subdivision of the city in the late 19th century. 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. Dow School was classified as "contributing" on the inventory of the Old Sixth Ward Historic District, which was designated as a Historic District of the City of Houston on June 25, 1998.

Part of the Fourth Ward until 1876, the Old Sixth Ward Historic District has the largest concentration of Victorian-era buildings in Houston. The majority of the houses standing today were built in the 1870's, 80's, and 90's as modest, one-story frame cottages occupied by a single family. The distinctive Victorian character of these dwellings was enhanced by decorative millwork usually applied to the front porches. As the 20th Century progressed, new housing reflected changes in architectural styles. Bungalows were built among the Victorian-era cottages, but the essential character of the neighborhood did not change. During World War II, many of the houses were converted from single to multi-family dwellings, often owned by absentee landlords. Since

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achieving recognition as both a nationally and locally designated historic district, the Old Sixth Ward has witnessed the restoration of many homes to single-family occupancy.

Dow School was designed in 1912 by C. H. Page, of Page & Brother Architects, Austin, Texas. The cornerstone of the building lists them as architect, including Street & Born as contractors. H. B. Rice, Mayor of Houston, is also listed.

Charles Henry Page (1876-1957) was a native of St. Louis, Missouri, who came to Austin, Texas in 1886. His father was a mason and contractor, who worked on the construction of the Texas State Capitol. Page received his training in architecture in the office of the local builder-architect, Burt McDonald. He began his practice at the age of nineteen in the firm of Makin and Page. By 1898 he was in independent practice as C. H. Page, Jr. but was joined by his brother, Louis soon thereafter. His first major commission was the first Austin National Bank building on Congress Avenue. In 1903 he received commission for the Texas Building at the St. Louis World's Fair. During his more than sixty years of practice, Page's firm grew substantially in size and prestige and he designed hundreds of schools and courthouses. When he died, the firm passed to his son, Charles Henry Page, Jr. and the firm today is known as Page Sutherland & Page with headquarters still in Austin. Among Page's varied works of interest is the Art Deco Travis County Courthouse (1930-1936) in Austin; Smith County Courthouse (1910), Tyler, Texas; Littlefield Building (1912) Austin; Herman Brown Building (of Brown & Root fame) (1938), Austin; Anderson County Courthouse (1914), Palestine, Texas; Savoy Apartments (1906), which was the first high-rise apartment building constructed in Houston; and Peden Iron & Steel Company (wholesale hardware building, 1906), Houston.

Page designed Dow School with influences of the Arts and Craft style, noted for its simplicity, modest brickwork and wide crenellations and mission-style arches of the parapet and portico. The building was constructed with brick veneer with a high raised foundation below two floors, and features a three bay façade with a central projecting porch. The building also features cast stone, decorative cartouches including "Dow School," which is displayed in the parapet wall over the entrance portico, and separate cartouches including "Boys" and "Girls" which are displayed over each entrance to side doors on either end of the building.

As noted in a history, written by Ophelia McGee, former school librarian, Dow School is one of the oldest public schools in the city. Its current location on Kane is actually its third. However, the school district had set aside the property of Block 428 for school use since 1876, when the Sixth Ward was created from the Fourth Ward.

From 1885 to 1887 a two-room school, known as Fourth Ward North School, was located at the foot of Trinity Street and had seats for one hundred and ten students. With increasing enrollment (171 pupils by September 1886) a new school was begun in the winter of 1886 at 1600 Washington Street at Ash. The new 2-story, wood frame building, built in the late-Victorian style, had six rooms and a seating capacity for 320 students. It was constructed from a design that was used for at least three other Houston public schools: Longfellow, Taylor and Rusk Schools. The new school was known as "Washington Street School" until 1887 when the superintendent of the Houston Public School, Justin E. Dow, died suddenly and the school name was changed as a memorial to him.

Justin E. Dow served as principal of Houston High School from 1882 to 1885 and as superintendent of Houston Public Schools from 1855 to 1887. In 1890 Dow School was one of 12 public schools in the city. There were also 15 private schools listed in the city directory for the city at that time. According to early Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of 1907, there were one and two-story houses existing on Block 428, the future site of Dow School. Some of the houses and buildings were moved, one example being a building, which was moved and

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attached to the side of the 1886 Weber House at 2003 Kane Street (City Landmark) and used as a store. Others were demolished when Dow School was constructed on the site in 1912.

Until 1926 Dow School included only the first through seventh grades and a kindergarten. That year the eighth grade was added and two schools were organized: the elementary school-grades one through five and the junior high school, grades six, seven and eight. By the late 1950s the school included a ninth grade. In 1953 a special "Americanization" class was added for students that needed to learn English.

Dow School was a pioneer in the field of special education for mentally retarded children. The first special class was established when the building first opened in 1912 and instruction continued throughout the 1950s. In the 1920s and 1930s there were as many as four special classes at Dow including English as a Second Language.

H. W. Elrod was the principal from 1922 and was still at that post when Ophelia McGee wrote the Dow School history in 1957. Preceding Mr. Elrod, beginning in 1885, was Henry B. Cline (first principal of Dow School), Miss Simms, T. J. Atwood, Mr. Skinner, Mr. Valentine, Mr. J. G. H. Buck, E. A. Cochran, J. E. Gibson and H. L. Mills.

The last special education classes were held at the school building in 1992, and the Houston Independent School District leased it in 1993 to Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA). The lease was for \$1.00 per year for a 15-year period. As a condition of the lease, MECA agreed that the building would be upgraded to meet current life safety, accessibility and code compliance requirements.

According to "Houston Architectural Guide" by Stephen Fox, MECA in cooperation with St. Joseph Multi-Ethnic Cultural Arts Committee and a landscape architecture studio from Texas A & M University under the guidance of Scott Slaney, designed Sixth Ward Community Park located at Kane and Trinity in 1989. The small community park's most remarkable features include a walled courtyard that contains painted tiles and face masks made by residents, working with the artists, Paul Kittleson and Carter Enst, and the cactus water fountain designed by Tim Glover. On the side of St. Joseph's Catholic Church parish school building is a mural called "A United Community," that was designed in 1985 by Sylvia Orozco and Pio Pulido.

Houston Independent School District is in the process of conveying the property to the City of Houston. As a historic preservation project of the Old Sixth Ward Tax Increment Refinance Zone (TIRZ), the title to the property will be transferred to MECA, which will continue to raise funds for its restoration. MECA is a community-based non-profit organization whose primary mission is to insure the healthy social and intellectual development of the inner-city youth of Houston through education in the Arts. By providing arts education as well as educational and behavioral counseling, MECA is able to emphasize the positive aspects of participant's cultures and offer them ample opportunity for mastering self-discipline and the skills required of any student of the arts.

The HAHC considered the initiation of an application for Landmark Designation for Dow School on January 16, 2003. On that date a motion was made to do so, and HAHC voted unanimously to initiate an application.

Before consideration of the Landmark application by City Council, Houston Independent School District (HISD) replatted the site, known as all of Block 428 (Lots 1 through 12), W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, Harris County, Texas into two distinct parcels. Parcel one, which includes 1.0202 acres of land, being all of Unrestricted Reserve "A", Block One (1), DOW SCHOOL BLOCK SUBDIVISION, is the site of the Dow School Building and the subject of this Landmark designation application. This parcel was conveyed by HISD

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on January 7, 2004 to the Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA). Parcel two, which includes 0.3572 acres of land, being all of Unrestricted Reserve "B", Block One (1), DOW SCHOOL BLOCK SUBDIVISION, is the site of a park. This parcel was conveyed also by HISD on January 7, 2004 but to the City of Houston, and this parcel is not part of this landmark designation application.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

Dow School was originally constructed in 1912. A Sanborn map from 1924 shows the original school building and the first series of additions: the extension of the east wing and the addition of the auditorium between the two wings. The 1924 map noted "Dow School, 2-stories with basement, Fire Proof Construction, 1913." Visual inspection of the structure strongly suggests the original school was an H-plan with the auditorium filling in between the wings on the south side and offices and the entry portico filling the space on the north side (facing Kane). The expansion of the school is represented in the Sanborn Maps from 1924 with pastovers from 1934, 1946 and finally 1951.

Despite numerous alterations over the years, Dow School retains its architectural character and integrity. There are many elements that are part of the integrity of the school and contribute to its historic significance.

Sources:

Most of the reference material for this report comes from "Dow School", researched and written by Anna Mod, Historic Preservation Consultant, October 2001, which includes an extensive Bibliography as follows:

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Other Sources:

Anderson County, Texas, Brief History; “Brown Building” (Internet); Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association Walking Tour brochure; Skyscrapers.com (Internet); Terry’s 1904 World’s Fair; University of Texas Education Series – “Littlefield Building” (Internet).

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 NA

S - satisfies 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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends landmark designation of the Dow School to the City Council.

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Site Location Map

Dow School

1900 Kane Street (aka 1901 Kane)

Not to Scale

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