

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Cochran-Hofheinz House  
**OWNER:** Lance and Barbara McKnight  
**APPLICANT:** Lance and Barbara McKnight  
**LOCATION:** 3900 Milam Street (aka 3918 Brandt Street)  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** June-03-2005

**AGENDA ITEM:** IV  
**P.C.MEETING DATE:**  
**HPO FILE No.:** 05L124  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** May-06-05  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:**07-20-05

**SITE INFORMATION**

BEING 0.52692 ACRES (22,952.79 SQUARE FEET), BEING THE SOUTH 50 FEET OF THE EAST ½ OF LOT 6, THE SOUTH ½ OF LOT 7, THE EAST ½ OF LOT 9, ALL OF LOTS 10, 11, AND 12, SAVE AND EXCEPT 450 SQUARE FEET OUT OF LOT 12 (BLOCK 11), JAMES BUTE ADDITION, CITY OF HOUTON, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS, AS SHOWN BY MAP OR PLAT RECORDED IN VOLUME 2, PAGE 19, MAP RECORDS OF HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS, AND THE NORTH 10.00 FEET OF BRANARD STREET LYING SOUTH OF AND ADJACENT TO THE EAST ½ OF LOT 9 AND LOTS 10,11 AND 12, BLOCK 11, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story, stucco clad residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:**

The Cochran-Hofheinz House, most likely constructed in 1912, may be the work of Russell Brown Company. The home was built for Owen L. Cochran, who was president of First National Bank, one of Houston's largest banks. In 1956 the home was purchased by Roy M. Hofheinz from one of the Cochran heirs. Hofheinz, a lawyer, was not only the youngest person to be elected to the Texas legislature, but when he was elected Harris County Judge in 1936, he became also the youngest person in the country ever elected to this position, thus providing him with the moniker, "The Judge." He became a very prosperous Houston business man and philanthropist. He also was elected Mayor of Houston in 1952. With Robert "Bob" Smith, Hofheinz, who had moved his offices to the house at 3918 Brandt Street, now known as 3900 Milam, created the Houston Sports Association for the purpose of obtaining a major league baseball team in Houston. It was in the offices of Hofheinz on Brandt Street (3900 Milam) where the idea of a covered sports stadium was first discussed, which resulted in the eventual construction of the Astrodome, which opened in 1965 and became "the Eighth Wonder of the World."

The Cochran-Hofheinz House exemplifies the type of residential building that is both historically and architecturally significant as part of Houston's past. It reflects the upwardly-mobile development of the city's South End that occurred in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It lends further historical credence to the city's urban growth for its role as the setting for major decision-making by Houston leaders at mid-century. From an architectural standpoint, the structure is illustrative of a residential style that was popular in upper middle-class neighborhoods at the time of its construction.

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

During the decade of the 1890s, the city of Houston began to experience rapid growth as its industrial base and commercial activity expanded. Prior to that time, residential and business areas existed side-by-side. With the expansion of the city's business district and the institution of streetcar service, however, residential enclaves began to develop south of downtown. On June 12, 1891, the city's first electric streetcar line began operating. The cars moved south on Fannin, west two blocks on McGowen (crossing Main near the old Fairgrounds), and north on Travis back to downtown, providing a round trip of about 2¾ miles. By the end of the century the name "South End" had generally been adopted for the route, as well as the entire area. In 1900—when the city reported a population of 44,633—the track on Fannin was pushed south to Berry Street after landowners raised \$4,500 to underwrite the extension. Shortly after the extension was made, the prestigious Westmoreland Addition—the city's first planned neighborhood—was established with its entrance gates at the corner of Berry and Louisiana where the streetcars turned. Real estate development in the South End continued to prosper, and in 1906 the Fannin Street track was again extended south, this time to Eagle Avenue. Like the previous extension, landowners paid a major part of the construction cost with most of the \$4,000 "bonus" coming from John H. Kirby, Henry F. MacGregor, and James Bute. The Dominican Sisters of Houston contributed \$250, since the extension served their new St. Agnes Academy, a school for girls located on Fannin Street. Kirby, MacGregor, and Bute owned extensive property in the South End, hence their interest in extending public transportation that would enhance residential development.

James Bute, a native of Scotland, had arrived in Houston in 1867 after spending some time in Canada constructing bridges in his trade as a civil engineer. Upon locating in Houston, he opened a small paint store. Bute traveled throughout south and central Texas taking orders for his fledgling enterprise. When he returned home to Houston, the orders would be filled and he would embark behind a team of oxen and deliver the goods to his customers. He continued to expand his business and in 1911 built a large warehouse to hold his goods. (This building is now Dakota Lofts on William Street in the Warehouse District in downtown Houston.) Offices for the company were located for a number of years in the Light Guard Armory on Texas Avenue. Although James Bute died in 1915, his company continued under family leadership until it closed in 1991.

In 1906, James Bute decided to develop a residential subdivision on land that had been owned by members of his wife's family. Bute was married to Sarah A. House, a daughter of James and Jane Day House. James House had moved to Houston from his native England c. 1845 with his wife and three daughters, Sarah being less than two years old at the time. Three more daughters were born after the family located in Texas. James was a brother of T. W. House, a prominent Houston businessman and one of the largest landowners in the area. James' occupation in both the 1850 and 1860 census is listed as gardener. These skills may have been utilized by both his son-in-law, James Bute, and his brother, T. W. House, who were known for their interest in horticulture and for the extensive plantings around their residences.

The land for Bute's proposed subdivision included a portion of Section 21 of the Obedience Smith Survey, a 3,370 acre tract granted to Obedience Smith on February 3, 1838. On April 7, 1906, three members of the family—Mary Jane House ( Sarah Bute's sister and a surviving daughter of James House), James House Bute (Sarah Bute's son who was named for his grandfather, James House, and who was the first physician to specialize in pediatric medicine in Houston), and John Bute (another son of Sarah Bute)--conveyed to James Bute all the rights, title and interest to Blocks 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18 and fractional blocks numbered 3 and 4 of the aforementioned Lot 21. In December, 1906, engineer Wilmer Waldo, a Princeton University graduate who laid out the Westmoreland Addition, platted this property to form the James Bute Addition. Since Henry F. MacGregor and John H. Kirby owned adjacent land, they joined in filing the plat map

to ensure the dedication of streets in the mapped area. The plan for the James Bute Addition was filed with the Harris County Clerk on March 18, 1907. It was bordered on the north by Mound Avenue (later renamed Sul Ross Avenue), on the south by Avenue C (later renamed Richmond Avenue), on the west by Garrott Street, and on the east by the terminus of Travis Street and the electric streetcar line. The streets within the subdivision were named Avenue A (later renamed Branard), West Main Avenue, Avenue B (later renamed Colquitt Avenue), Bute Street, Brandt Street, and Day Street. Many of these arteries were named for Bute family members or business associates. Brandt Street, on which the Cochran-Hofheinz House is located, was named for Gustavus Brandt, general manager of the James Bute Co. for many years.

The property containing the Cochran-Hofheinz House changed hands several times over the next five years. On November 30, 1906, shortly after obtaining the property, James and Sarah Bute sold Lots 11, 12, east ½ of 10, and south ½ of 7 in block 11 for \$3,750 to Walter C. Huff, secretary-treasurer of the C. R. Cummings Export Co. and of the C. R. Cummings Lumber Co. On August 2, 1909, James and Sarah Bute sold Lots 8, 9, west ½ of 10, and south ½ of 6 in block 11 for \$4,500 to Dr. John H. Foster, a physician specializing in ear, nose, and throat medicine. On August 28, 1911, Dr. Foster sold the west ½ Lot 10, east ½ Lot 9 and south ½ Lot 6 in block 11 to Mrs. Mattye D. Huff for \$1,600. That same day Walter C. Huff and his wife, Mattye, contracted to sell their combined property to Mary A. Cochran for \$9,000. This final transfer of real estate resulted in the boundaries of the property as they exist today.

The precise date of construction of the house has not been determined, but a 1912 construction date is the most likely one. The Owen L. Cochran family is listed in the 1913 Houston City Directory as living at 3918 Brandt Street. The Cochran family members residing at this address in 1913 consisted of Owen L. Cochran; his wife, Mary Alice; sons Owen Jr., John S., Porter; and daughter, Mary. Another son, William S. Cochran, was occupying a home across the street at 4004 Brandt Street.

Owen L. Cochran, a native of Tennessee, was four years old when his family sailed from New Orleans in 1834 and landed in Texas at what is now Morgan's Point. Within a year they had moved to Houston and lived in a tent until a house was available. Cochran became a clerk in the post office at the age of eighteen. Soon he became an active member of the town's volunteer fire department. An injury suffered in fighting a fire prevented him from serving in the military during the Civil War. Instead, he acted as postmaster during the war years. In 1875 Cochran helped in organizing the Houston Land and Trust Co., and the following year he established Cochran Insurance Agency. Houston Land and Trust evolved into Houston Citizens Bank, while Cochran's Insurance Agency remained a viable business in Houston for more than 100 years. The same year that Cochran opened his insurance company, he married Mary Alice Shepherd, daughter of banker B. A. Shepherd, and joined the staff of First National Bank, which Shepherd headed.

Benjamin Armistead Shepherd is considered a true pioneer in Houston's banking industry. A Virginian who moved to Texas in 1839, Shepherd began in the mercantile business and, because merchants handled banking functions for their customers, he soon found himself as a director of the first chartered bank in the state. After the Civil War, he moved from private banking to become the president of the recently-chartered First National Bank in Houston. Besides his banking operations, Shepherd was deeply involved with most developments contributing to the economic growth of his community—building construction, railroads, steamboat lines, even a textile mill. When Shepherd died in 1891, First National Bank (which became First City National Bank in 1956) had deposits of \$1.25 million. His name can be found today on Shepherd Drive and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University.

At the time of Owen Cochran's death in 1914, he was serving as president of First National Bank. His son, William Shepherd Cochran, also had a distinguished career of fifty years with First National. He entered the bank's employ as a messenger in 1898, became a director in 1902, an assistant cashier in 1904, cashier in 1908, and vice president in 1913. William Cochran also served as president of the Houston Chamber of Commerce in 1941-42.

Owen and Mary Alice Cochran had six children, five of whom lived in the home at 3918 Brandt at some time. Owen Cochran died in 1914 at the age of 81; his wife died four years later at the age of 64. Their daughter, Nellie Cochran Gray and her husband, Ernest, an attorney, moved into 3918 Brandt where they remained several years along with unmarried members of the family. A member of the Cochran family lived in the home until 1936. The following year the structure became Colligan's Rest Home and soon thereafter was divided into furnished apartments. This use of the residence continued until 1956.

On July 24, 1956, Roy M. Hofheinz purchased the property from Owen L. Cochran Jr. for \$37,500. Hofheinz was born in Beaumont, Texas, in 1912 and moved to Houston with his parents in 1924. Four years later he graduated with highest honors from San Jacinto High School, having been a champion debater and a super salesman for school events. He attended Rice Institute, Houston Junior College, and Houston Law School, where he graduated at the age of nineteen. He then opened a law office on Capitol Avenue near the courthouse. Three years later, he became the youngest person to be elected to the Texas legislature. After one term, he decided to run for Harris County Judge and was elected in 1936, making him at the age of 24 the youngest person in the country ever elected to this position and providing him with the moniker, "The Judge," which he was called by friends and associates the rest of his life. In 1944, Hofheinz returned to private enterprise. Over the next few years, he acquired a chain of radio stations, part-ownership in television stations (including KTRK), and real estate holdings. In 1952 Hofheinz was elected mayor of Houston. He used Houston's "strong mayor" powers so thoroughly that he developed an acrimonious relationship with members of City Council. The conflict escalated when Hofheinz's 1955 budget called for higher taxes. After weeks of heated debate, City Council voted to impeach Hofheinz. An uneasy compromise was reached with an agreement that the mayor and council members resubmit themselves to voters in a special election, in which Hofheinz was defeated. He returned to his law practice, but his greatest accomplishment lay ahead. He and Robert (Bob) Smith created the Houston Sports Association for the purpose of obtaining a major league baseball team in Houston. By this time, Hofheinz had purchased the house at 3918 Brandt Street and had located his business offices there. In **The Grand Huckster, Judge Roy Hofheinz, Genius of the Astrodome** Edgar W. Ray refers to meetings held in the Brandt Street house at which the idea of a covered sports stadium was first discussed. It is apparent that the seeds for the Astrodome, the world's first domed stadium, were planted and brought to fruition at this location. Hofheinz proceeded to develop the Astrodome, which opened in 1965 and was promptly nicknamed "the Eighth Wonder of the World." Building on this success, he then developed a nearby entertainment complex, containing an amusement park and several hotels. Ray states in his book that all of these business deals were negotiated in the "basement at Brandt Street."

Hofheinz ultimately relocated his offices to the Astrodome complex. In 1975 the Hofheinz Foundation offered the use of the house to Harris County as a shelter for troubled youth. Known as the Hofheinz Sand Dollar House for Youth, it provided emergency shelter and counseling for 250 to 300 youths a year. In 1989 the house was renovated and was made available to Houston MediaSource, a public-access cable television company, which remained there until recently. The current owners purchased the property in 2005.

Although it has not been determined who might have designed or built the house, it is similar in style and size to those constructed by The Russell Brown Co., an architectural and contracting firm that began

erecting houses in Houston in 1908 and is credited with building more houses in Houston's South End from 1908 to the 1940s than any single firm. There is evidence that Russell Brown was the contractor for houses in the James Bute Addition. Even though no documentation has been found to definitely attribute the house to The Russell Brown Company, a publication—thought to have been compiled in 1919—shows a home constructed in 1913 on Day Street in the James Bute Addition. Furthermore, there are two unidentified homes in the publication that have similar features to those found on the Cochran-Hofheinz House. The Russell Brown publication also has extensive information on local firms which supplied building materials for residential development at that time.

The two-and-a half-story Cochran-Hofheinz House is constructed of stucco with wood trim. A classically styled, square portico, supported by round, Doric columns, extends from the front of the structure. A second porch supported by identical columns extended down the south side of the house. The home exhibits also some Prairie-style characteristics while the porches, with their columns and dentil molding, reflect Colonial Revival features. A large carriage house/garage, containing second-floor living quarters, was placed at the rear of the house. The exterior of the house has been altered very little over the years. The front entrance was obviously "modernized" with a new door and fixed sidelights. The rear of the side porch was enclosed to make an additional room, and the second-story space above this porch, which may have been open or could possibly have been a sleeping porch, was also enclosed. A second-floor addition and exterior stairs were added at the back, possibly when the space was adapted for apartments. The current owners plan to remove these rear additions, as well as return the front entrance to its original design. The automobile storage space in the garage was enclosed at some point; the owners also plan to return this space to its original appearance. When Spur 527 was built in the early 1960s to connect Highway 59 with downtown, it altered the configuration of the streets in the James Bute Addition. As a result, the address for the house became 3900 Milam and remains that today.

### Bibliographical Sources:

- Ancestry.com United States Census Records 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930
- Baron, Steven. *Houston Electric: The Street Railways of Houston, Texas*. Lexington, Ky: Steven Baron, 1996.
- Bracey, H. L. Bracey's Block Maps of the City of Houston, 1929, 1946.
- Cochran, Robert Palmer. Telephone interview by Betty Chapman, July 6, 2005.
- Deaca, Marian. "A Brief History of the Montrose Area." Harris County Heritage Society publication, undated.
- Deed Records for Harris County, Texas: 1906-1911, 1956.
- Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide, Second Edition*. Houston: The American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1999.
- Hofheinz Fund Annual Report, nd.
- Houghton, Dorothy Knox Howe, Barrie M. Scardino, Sadie Gwin Blackburn and Katherine S. Howe. *Houston's Forgotten Heritage: Landscape, Houses, Interiors 1824-1914*. Houston: Rice University Press, 1991.
- Houston Architectural Survey. Houston: The American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter, 1980.
- Houston Chronicle*, August 28, 1941.
- Houston Chronicle*, October 3, 1945.
- Houston City Directories, 1907-1970.
- Houston City Maps, 1907, 1910, 1912, 1920, 1962

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Johnston, Marguerite. *Houston- The Unknown City 1836-1946*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991.

Kirkland, William A. *Old Bank – New Bank, The First National Bank of Houston 1966-1956*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1975.

Montgomery, Julia Cameron. *Houston as a Setting of the Jewel – The Rice Institute 1913*. Houston: The Rice Historical Society, reprint 2002.

Ray, Edgar W. *The Grand Huckster: Houston's Judge Roy Hofheinz, Genius of the Astrodome*. Memphis: Memphis State University, 1980.

Russell Brown Company Catalogue. Houston: Cummins & Son, Inc. 1919 (?).

Siegel, Stanley E. *Houston: A Chronicle of the Supercity on Buffalo Bayou*. Woodland Hills, California: Windsor, 1983.

Tyler, Ron, ed. *The New Handbook of Texas, Vol. 3*. Austin: Texas State Historical Society, 1996.

## 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 | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;   |               |                      |                     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.   |               |                      |                     |

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends Landmark Designation to the Houston Planning Commission for the Cochran-Hofheinz House at 3900 Milam Street.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP  
COCHRAN-HOPHEINZ HOUSE  
3900 MILAM STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

