

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Milroy House

OWNER: Alan Bies

APPLICANT: Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission

LOCATION: 1102 Heights Blvd - Houston Heights MRA

HEARING NOTICE: Oct-13-06

AGENDA ITEM: III.q

HPO FILE NO.: 06L151

DATE ACCEPTED: N/A

HAHC HEARING DATE: Nov-16-06

P.C. MEETING DATE: Nov-30-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 13, 14, 15, & 16, Block 200, Houston Heights Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-and-a-half-story, frame house.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation – House and Carriage House

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Milroy House was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on November 12, 1980. It is included within the boundaries of Houston Heights, which was designated as a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) by the National Register Program on June 22, 1983. The home has also been designated as a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark (RTHL). This house was the home of John Milroy, who was very active in the development of Houston Heights and served as mayor from 1899 to 1907. This house is one of the best and earliest houses remaining on Heights Boulevard.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Milroy House is not only a fine example of late-Victorian frame architecture, but is also significant historically as one of the earliest houses in the town of Houston Heights and as the home of one of the men most influential in the development of that area. Built in 1898, the house was home to John Milroy until his death in 1918. Descendants of the Milroy family resided in the house until 1979. It remains the most impressive nineteenth century house on the street, with its original carriage house.

George Franklin Barber was a Knoxville, Tennessee architect, who originally revolutionized the publishing of house plans and distributing them through catalogues nationally. Barber actually gave individuals the ability to have a house designed by an architect without the cost of hiring one (in most cases and in many parts of the country, there were no architects to hire even if desired). In fact Barber did not just sell his house plans “as is” but encouraged his clients to make suggestions, for their particular lot or needs, which he would incorporate into the plans they chose. All materials, including intricate millwork, could be ordered from the company and shipped via railroad. In fact, the Omaha and South Texas Land Company used Barber’s plans initially from 1892-1896 to build 17 houses in Houston Heights, of which only a few survive today, including 1102 Heights Boulevard, and its carriage house, and 1802 Harvard Street (City of Houston Landmark; N.R. and RTHL).

John Milroy was very active civically and socially in the development of Houston Heights, and served as mayor from 1899 till 1907. Milroy bought his first land from the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1894, thus becoming one of the first five citizens involved in the development of the new municipality know as Houston Heights. He was manager of the company’s Houston Heights Office during the booming years of Heights development until 1917. His expertise in real estate was one of the most important reasons for the successful and rapid growth of the Heights outward from its initial emphasis along Heights Blvd, which also carried a rail line to the suburb.

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The house stands on a prominent corner lot at the intersection of 11th St and Heights Blvd. It was often used in promotional information as an example of the fine houses being built in Houston Heights at the turn of the century. The two-and-a-half-story, clapboard house with contrasting trim displays some characteristics of the Stick style. It has a varying roofline with several small projecting gables and bays and a small tower in the front. The upper gables are ornamented with fish-scale shingles. Awnings supported by flat-cut brackets with the same type of shingle shield several of the windows. A porch across the front of the house and extending along each side is decorated with turned posts and balusters. The side and front steps also have turned balusters. A transom including a floral design combining stained, etched, leaded, and beveled glass is over the double front doors; this design is repeated in the half-length panes of these doors and in the transom of the single side door.

Behind the primary structure, and fronting on 11th Street, stands a one-and-a-half-story carriage house complementary in style to the larger house and probably built at the same time. It is wood frame with two sets of double, swinging garage doors. The roof is four intersecting, shingled gables.

The fine details and craftsmanship of the Milroy House well reflect the building styles of the late-Victorian era. As one of the few residences of this type and size remaining in Houston Heights, it illustrates not only the architecture of that period, but also the social habits of the family that occupied it. An especially interesting feature of the house is the large number of hidden cubbyholes and storage spaces. These are found in window seats, in steps that lift off to reveal deep openings, and in secret removable panels in the baseboards of the halls. Milroy could have added many of these for security, because several records and ledgers from the Houston Heights Office have been discovered in the spaces. There is also a basement, which is not a common feature in this part of the country.

More importantly, the Milroy House reflects a deliberate approach to town planning. It was built with consideration of the restrictive covenants in the deeds to all the lots on Heights Blvd. These stated that no structure costing less than \$2,500 could be built on the lots, and that a setback of 40 feet was required. For these reasons, most early houses on Heights Boulevard were large and detailed in contrast to many of the simpler styles later displayed on other streets. From the beginning, the small suburb was planned to be a healthy combination of large and small residences working together to form a comfortable, unified neighborhood.

Houston Heights was designated a MRA because it was at one time an independent municipality. Within its original boundaries are numerous historic buildings, many of which are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Houston Heights was developed by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891. It was incorporated as a city in 1896, and at that time, was the earliest and largest totally planned community in Texas. It flourished as a distinct municipality until the residents voted to be annexed by the City of Houston in 1918.

Today, the area still maintains the feeling of a distinctive, self-contained “small town” with its predominantly small 19th-century, one-story and two-story Victorian-era homes, and numerous early 20th-century bungalow style buildings. It also boasts a thriving business district on 19th Street (now predominantly antique shops and restaurants) and a large industrial district west of the business section. Also located in the neighborhood are a number of historic churches, theatres, corner stores, private and public parks, municipal facilities, schools, the Heights Branch Library, and the original Houston Heights City Hall and Fire Station building, both of which have been designated as Landmarks as well as Protected Landmarks of the City of Houston.

At the March 13, 1997 public hearing of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), the HAHC discussed the expiration of the two-year temporary designation of all landmarks that City Council had previously designated when the Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted on March 1, 1995. Since the designation had expired, the HAHC requested that the planning staff contact the owners of these landmarks to

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determine their interest in the HAHC initiating an application for permanent Landmark designation. Owners have been contacted on four occasions in the past and advised that the HAHC would initiate the designation of their buildings for them. Most recently, a letter from Mayor Bill White was sent certified on July 11, 2006 to each property owner of a National Register designated site in Houston Heights, once again encouraging the property owner to support the HAHC in initiating the designation of their historic building as a Landmark of the City of Houston. The letter asked that the property owner respond ONLY if they did not want the HAHC to initiate designation, and included a list of the benefits of designation. On August 24, 2006, the HAHC voted unanimously to initiate the designation of this building as a Landmark of the City of Houston, with the application for designation to be considered at the HAHC meeting on September 21, 2006.

The HAHC had previously instructed the planning staff that if any landmark had been designated by the National Register program (N.R.), as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL), a State Archaeological Site (SAL), or a temporary landmark of the City of Houston, then the application would be considered for permanent Landmark designation on that merit alone, because all of the required information has been filed to obtain status. Therefore, regarding the preparation of the application, HAHC agreed to consider the application with minimal information provided to them.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The building has not been altered inappropriately since the National Register designation and is maintained in a historic manner by the current owner.

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
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- (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:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Milroy House at 1102 Heights Blvd.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
MILROY HOUSE
1102 HEIGHTS BLVD
NOT TO SCALE

