

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Ella Kennedy-Helen O. Bissonnet House

OWNER: Zachary Brett Mize

APPLICANT: Same as Owner

LOCATION: 2009 Kane Street – Old Sixth Ward Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: I.b

HPO FILE NO.: 06PL26

DATE ACCEPTED: Sept-11-06

HAHC HEARING: Oct-19-06

PC HEARING: Oct-26-06

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 9, Block 416, W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic one-story, wood frame residence with prominent front porch, raised on seven-foot-tall brick piers.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Ella C. Kennedy-Helen O. Bissonnet House, located at 2009 Kane, is a contributing structure in the Old Sixth Ward City of Houston Historic District. The home is also located within the boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward National Register Historic District. The home was constructed circa 1880 and was most likely used for the rental market. Rental properties were vital to the early makeup of the 6th Ward and were used to provide housing for many of the people who worked for the various railroads which traversed the area. In addition, the home is a rare surviving example of a raised cottage which is seldom seen in Houston. Furthermore, in the first 25 years of the home's existence, the property ownership was transferred solely between women, with the exception of Elias Thorpe. Thorpe sold the property on behalf of his deceased wife. Henry Lighthouse, who purchased the home from Eliza Williams and Ellie Kennedy, sold it the same day to Helen O. Bissonnet. The building meets several criteria for designation, including Criteria 4 and 5, as well as being constructed before 1905.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Ella C. Kennedy-Helen O. Bissonnet House, located at 2009 Kane Street, was constructed circa 1880. It is a "contributing" structure located within the boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward Historic District designated by Houston City Council in 1998. The home is also located within the boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward National Register Historic District listed in 1978.

The home is located within the W.R. Baker Addition to the City of Houston, which is more commonly known as the Sixth Ward. The W.R. Baker Addition was first platted in 1856 by William R. Baker. Baker owned a large tract of land from the original two leagues of land granted to John Austin from the Mexican government. Baker's tract of land extended from the north bank of Buffalo Bayou to the southern boundary of the Beauchamp Springs tract on the southern edge of White Oak Bayou. In 1867, William R. Baker sold Blocks 296, 396, 407, 416, and 428 on the north side of Buffalo Bayou to James A. Chandler, of Travis County, Texas, for nine thousand dollars. All of the blocks were located within the area now known as the Sixth Ward, except for block 296, which was located in the nearby First Ward. The area between Center Street and Buffalo Bayou, where four out of five of Chandler's blocks were located, had originally been considered to be a part of the Fourth Ward until the late 19th Century when this area was redrawn as Houston's Sixth Ward.

In March of 1872, James Chandler sold the same blocks from the Baker Addition to F. W. Chandler, also of Travis County, Texas, for only \$500. At this time no "improvements" are mentioned in the sale. In April 1878, F. W. Chandler sold lot 9 in Block 416 of the William R. Baker subdivision to Ella C. Kennedy. Ella C. Kennedy purchased the lot in the Sixth Ward from attorneys, S.S. Ashe and Garrett Hardcastle, acting on behalf of F. W. Chandler. The deed for \$200 does not mention improvements, and it is presumed that no building was on this site at the time of sale.

In December 1883, Eliza A. Williams, acting as the legal guardian of the estate of "Ellie C. Kennedy a minor", sold the property "with improvements thereon" to Mary F. Thorpe. Mary Thorpe, Eliza Williams, and Ellie Kennedy all lived in the home of Elias Thorpe, a brickmaker who lived at the southwest corner of Henderson and Decatur Streets. Eliza A. Williams was in charge of the estate, but it is unclear what her relationship was, if any, with the young Ellie Kennedy. No other Kennedys were listed as living at that address. Eliza Williams continued to live in the two-story "I" shaped home of Elias Thorpe for the following five years.

Elias Thorpe sold the lot and improvements at 2009 Kane back to Eliza Williams in January of 1885. At this time, Thorpe acted on behalf of his deceased wife Mary Thorpe. The sale price of five dollars "and other good reasons thereunto me moving" suggests that there was a family connection between Thorpe and Eliza Williams. Eliza Williams and Ellie C. Kennedy later sold the same property to Henry Lighthouse in July 1893 for \$450 at ten percent interest. Lighthouse sold the property on the same day to Helen Odile Bissonnet for \$550. Since none of the owners of the property, to this point, resided at 2009 Kane, it is presumed to have been constructed for the rental market.

The Kennedy-Bissonnet House is a raised Victorian cottage which rests on a seven-foot-high brick pier foundation. Although relatively few raised cottages remain in Houston, other surviving examples can be seen at 617 Silver and at 1720 Ovid Street in nearby First Ward. The roof is classified as a hipped roof with belvedere, more commonly known by the moniker, "widow's walk". The home was originally constructed with a simple four-sided exterior with a front porch inset beneath the roofline of the main body of the house. A later Victorian alteration adding a projecting bay to the front (north) façade and the western elevation is visible on a 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map of the area. Surviving historic brick piers beneath the main original portion of the home exhibit characteristics of low-fired, locally produced bricks, but the piers beneath the projecting bay additions are of a different style and color of brick suggesting a later date of manufacture. The home is currently sided with horizontal beveled wood siding which is historic. Restoration work in the early 1990's revealed an earlier board and batten siding which predates the current beveled siding. It is probable that the beveled siding was added over the existing board and batten siding when the home was remodeled during Victorian times in order to incorporate the new projecting bays. The home features a mix of two-over-two and one-over-one pane, wood-sash windows. These window types were common from circa 1880 until the first quarter of the 20th century and may date to the time of the circa 1895 remodeling.

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 1870s, 80s, and 90s 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 style. Bungalows were built among the Victorian 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 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.

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RESTORATION HISTORY:

The one-story residential building is a Queen Anne style home featuring a one-story porch supported by round, classical columns; prominent front-facing gable with pent roof; bay window; and hip roof with intersecting gables. According to the applicant, the original house was a simple cottage with a hip roof. According to a 1907 Sanborn map of the structure, it appears to have been extensively remodeled to its current footprint. The historic home at 2009 Kane underwent a major renovation after its purchase in the early 1990's. Prior to that time serious deferred maintenance had endangered the very existence of this structure. In October 1997, a Certificate of Appropriateness was granted for the construction of a rear addition to the house built on piers equal in height to those of the historic house. Another Certificate of Appropriateness was sought by the property owner and granted by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission at the June 20, 2002 meeting for the construction of a two-story addition also to the rear of the 1997 addition.

Bibliography:

- Fox, Stephen. Houston Architectural Guide. Houston: American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990.
- Harris County Deed Records, Volumes 5, 18, 29, 31, 67, and 68.
- Houston City Directories, various dates 1878-1895.
- Personal Interview, Thomas McWhorter with property owner, September 22, 2006.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

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

- (a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider three or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the Protected Landmark designation. If the HAHC reviews an application for designation of a Protected Landmark initiated after the designation of the Landmark, the HAHC shall review the basis for its initial recommendation for designation and may recommend designation of the landmark as a protected landmark unless the property owner elects to designate and if the landmark has met at least (3) three of the criteria of Section 33-224 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) at the time of its designation or, based upon additional information considered by the HAHC, the landmark then meets at least (3) three of criteria of Section 33-224 of the HPO, as follows:

- | S | NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input 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"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input 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; | | | |

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- (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.

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

- The property was listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a "contributing structure" in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

OR

- The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission recommend to the Houston City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Ella C. Kennedy-Helen O. Bissonnet House at 2009 Kane Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Planning and Development Department

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SITE LOCATION MAP
ELLA C. KENNEDY/ HELEN O. BISSONNET HOUSE
2099 KANE STREET
NOT TO SCALE



