

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Samuel J. and Mary Ann Saragusa House

**AGENDA ITEM:** II.c

**OWNER:** David and Susan Neal

**HPO FILE NO.:** 06PL27

**APPLICANT:** Anna Mod for Owners

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Oct-2-06

**LOCATION:** 1801 Southmore Boulevard

**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Oct-19-06

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**PC HEARING DATE:** Oct-26-2006

### SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 13 and Tract 12, Block 4, Southmore 106 Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick veneer residence and two-story garage with quarters.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Samuel J. and Mary Ann Saragusa House is an important reminder of the contributions of the Italian-American community in Houston, Texas. The Saragusa family first operated a grocery business and later expanded their interests into the insurance and real estate businesses. Furthermore, the house is a good example of the Tudor style of architecture which was once prevalent in Houston and particularly in the Southmore addition. The Saragusa House meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4 for designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The 1935 Saragusa House at 1801 Southmore Boulevard is a two-story, brick-veneered residential structure, which is a good example of the Tudor Revival style of architecture popular in Houston in the first decades of the twentieth-century. The house was the residence of the Samuel Joseph and Mary Ann Saragusa family, first generation Italian-American Houstonians.

Antonio Saragusa, Samuel's father, arrived in New York City from Mezzojuso, Sicily in 1887. By 1900, he had established Tony Saragusa's Grocery and Saloon at 2207 Commerce Street in Houston. Typical of small grocery and corner stores of this era, the immigrant family lived above the store. In 1906, the Saragusas constructed a two-story brick building at 2406 German Street (later changed to Canal Street) and the family again lived above the store. Business expanded, and by 1910, the Saragusas had multiple store locations and sold groceries, meats, and operated a beer saloon. German Street was renamed Canal Street at the outbreak of the first World War and by 1920, the street was a thriving commercial area in Houston's East End.

Antonio and his wife, Mary Morales Saragusa, had three children, all born in Houston: Samuel Joseph (1901-1981); Joseph Anthony (b. 01/20/08); and John B. (1909-1980).

Samuel Saragusa's education was cut short in the seventh grade, and he helped with the family grocery business. At 16, he went to work as a stenographer for an insurance agency, and by 1924, he was the office manager and notary for A. L. Vetrano and Company, another insurance establishment. Two years later, he and his younger brother, Joseph, founded Sam J. Saragusa & Company, an insurance business, with offices in the First National Bank Building in downtown Houston. At this time, Joseph was attending and playing baseball for Rice Institute

(later known as Rice University). He dropped out in 1930 after his father's death and took over the operations of the family business.

In October 1935, Sam Saragusa married Mary Ann Maida (b. 03/10/11). The newlyweds continued to live above the store on Canal Street with Sam's mother, Mary, and his married brother John. Construction on the house at 1801 Southmore began in the fall of 1935, and by 1936, the couple moved to the new house along with Sam's mother. Sam and Mary Ann had three daughters, Mary Ann, Sophie Mae and Sammie Jean, and the family lived at 1801 Southmore until 1960. The house then became a rental property. A neighborhood daycare center, Bunny Land A-Cat-A-Me, operated in the house from 1963-1988. Curtis Marie Thomas-Bass and her husband, George Bass, owned the property from 1988-2001. In 2000, Dave Roy founded an artists' collective, called Southmore House, and the house became an art gallery, performance space, and artists' collective with studio spaces for lease. The logo for the group included an image of the house façade. The house was sold in a foreclosure auction in 2001, with the new buyers hoping to sell out to area townhouse developers. Susan and David Neal had been looking for a house in the Third Ward to restore and did not want to displace a neighborhood family. The couple purchased the house in 2004 to rehabilitate it while maintaining its historic character.

A plat for the subdivision of "Reserve S" in Outlot Number 106 in the Southmore Addition was approved in 1929. "Reserve S" was a large undivided parcel bounded by Almeda to the east; Southmore to the south; Wichita to the north and Chenevert to the west. It was owned by Henry F. MacGregor. MacGregor's widow, Elizabeth S. MacGregor, executrix of his estate, made application for the plat with F. J. De Meritt (nephew) and John V. Van De Mark, both executors of the estate. The surrounding area had been platted and developed beginning in the early 1920s with a predominance of two-story, single-family houses and duplexes. Houston architect, Maurice Sullivan, designed and built a house in 1923 for himself and his family on Southmore in the Tudor Revival style several blocks west of the subject property. The two buildings share several character-defining elements of the style, such as the swooping forward facing gable and the decorative detailing on the chimney. Tudor Revival was one of the dominant styles for residential suburban architecture in the 1920s and 1930s across the country. A side gabled roof, a façade with a prominent forward-facing, steeply pitched gable, and a patterned brick chimney topped with chimney pots typically characterizes the style. All of these elements are featured on the Saragusa house.

The General Contractor's Bulletin of 1934 announced the award of a building contract from F. J. De Merrett [sic], notary public of Houston, to L. A. Robichaux, a contractor, for the construction of a brick-veneered, two-story residence at 1801 Southmore. In a deed dated July 20, 1935, Sam J. Saragusa purchased 1801 Southmore from the Central City Corporation, a development company operated by MacGregor's heirs.

The Southmore Addition first appears in the 1924-1951 Volume 5 edition of the Sanborn Maps in a map dated 1925. This early map shows MacGregor's undeveloped parcel. The house appears on a subsequent Sanborn map as a two-story frame house with a brick veneer. The front portico has a metal, slate, tile, or asbestos shingle roof, and the small, one-story porch in the rear has a composition roof. Typical of houses of this era, there is a two-story, wood framed "A & D" (auto and dwelling) building with a shingle roof to the rear of the main house.

The Saragusa house is nominated for a City of Houston Protected Landmark under Criteria 3 for its association with the Saragusa family, as representative of the first generation Italian-American Houstonians whose parents began immigrating to Houston before the turn of the 20th century. Many of these immigrants were involved in the grocery business and later in food service. The Saragusa name is well known in Houston's Italian-American community alongside the Mandola, Lorino, Carrabba, and Butera families. The house is also nominated under Criteria 4 as an example of the Tudor Revival style of architecture.

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:**

The Tudor Revival style structure at 1801 Southmore is two-story, four-by-three bay, wood frame with brick veneer residential structure. It faces south onto Southmore Boulevard in the Southmore Addition, Section Four, in central Houston's Third Ward neighborhood. The side gable house is a traditional, I-plan form with its four bay frontal symmetry, obscured by a swooping forward-facing gable in the first bay, that extends to the west of the house to incorporate a Roman arched passage to the side yard. Adjacent to this dramatic gable is a decorative exterior chimney with cast stone detailing. The small, brick, gable-roofed portico is punctuated by a cast stone Roman archway with projecting quoins, voussoirs, and keystone, and two arched openings on the side walls. The windows of the house are all 1/1 wooden sash. The three bay west façade is symmetrical with paired 1/1 wooden sash windows flanking two single entry doors covered by a modest gabled canopy. The second floor has a single 1/1 window in the first bay, and the paired windows of the first floor are repeated in the third. There is an arched, wooden louvered window at the attic level. The sills are defined by slightly projecting bricks and the lintels by a vertical brick course.

The home also incorporates a two-story, side gabled, wood frame, clapboard clad outbuilding that is located directly to the north (rear) of the house. The symmetrical structure faces west onto Chenevert Street. The building features two door openings on the ground floor, above which are small gabled canopies supported by knee brackets. The windows are 1/1 wooden sash, and there is a small, shed-roofed addition to the east (rear) of the structure.

**Bibliography:**

Bracey's Block Map of the City of Houston, Texas, 1929.

City Directories, various dates.

Federation of Italian American Organizations of Greater Houston, Inc. *Houstonians of Italian Descent; Their Culture and Heritage, Volume 1*. Cate Media, 1992.

Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*. Houston: American Institute of Architects, Houston Chapter and Herring Press, 1990.

Harris County Deed Records, Volumes 873, 851, 863, 867, 946.

Harris County Plat Map, volume 9, page 70. March 1, 1929.

*Houston Chronicle*, various dates.

Personal interview, Susan Neal with Mary Ann Saragusa Guarino, Houston, August 27, 2006.

Sanborn Maps, 1924-1951, Volume 5, sheet 578.

Texas General Contractors Association, *Texas General Contractors Bulletin*, 1935.

U.S. Census, 1910.

**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



**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Samuel J. and Mary Ann Saragusa House at 1801 Southmore Boulevard.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP  
SAMUEL J. AND MARY ANN SARAGUSA HOUSE  
1801 SOUTHMORE BLVD  
NOT TO SCALE

