

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House – Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South

OWNERS: Carole and Don Busick

APPLICANTS: Same as Owners

LOCATION: 108 Stratford Street

AGENDA ITEM: I.d

HPO FILE NO: 06PL28

DATE ACCEPTED: Sep-19-2006

HAHC HEARING: Oct-19-2006

PC HEARING: Oct-26-2006

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 4, Block 6, Avondale Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes two-story, wood frame residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House - Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South at 108 Stratford Street in the Avondale subdivision was built in 1912 for John E. Edmundson and his wife Isabenda. The Edmundsons occupied the home until 1919 when it was sold to Houston notables, Walter Fondren, William L. Clayton, and John T. Scott, acting as trustees for the Houston District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. The home became the residence of the presiding Methodist Church South elder for the next twenty-three years. The home represents a blending of two unique American architectural styles, the American Foursquare and Prairie School. The house meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5 for designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House - Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South is located at 108 Stratford within the Avondale East Historic District. The Avondale East Historic District includes the 100 Blocks of Avondale and Stratford as well as the eastern half of the 200 block of Stratford. The historic district is one of seven thus far designated by City Council.

Avondale was one of several upscale, “suburban” neighborhoods developed during the first quarter of the 20th century, which included Westmoreland, Courtlandt Place, Audubon Place, and Montrose. This area attracted Houston’s business and social elite more than a decade before the creation of River Oaks, Houston’s undisputed upscale neighborhood. Avondale was first platted in 1907. It derived its name from a variation on the name of William Shakespeare’s hometown in England, Stratford-upon-Avon. According to an Art Nouveau-style ad in the May 25, 1907 Houston Daily Post newspaper, the name Avondale was chosen from a publicly advertised naming contest. Nine contestants tied for the \$25 prize, which was increased to \$27 so that the nine winners could split the money evenly. The two major thoroughfares in Avondale were named Avondale and Stratford. Avondale offered many attractive perks to upper echelon Houstonians. All unsightly utility lines and garbage bins were accessed from the alleyways behind every home. The concrete curbs and sidewalks were tinted a pleasing shade of pink so as not to strain the eye in the afternoon sun, and streets were paved with oyster shell. Furthermore, no businesses, boarding houses, or structures costing less than \$5,000 were allowed within the neighborhood. The developers touted it as a “first class neighborhood.” The streets were landscaped with a variety of oaks, palms, and camphor trees planted by the fledgling Teas Nursery.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Houston boomed after major oil strikes in the early 1900s in nearby East Texas oilfields, including Spindletop and Goose Creek. Cotton also played a major economic role, and was so important to the local economy that a Houston Cotton Exchange was created which tracked the price of cotton like commodities on New York's Wall Street Stock Exchange. Avondale played host to many of the men involved in the oil and cotton business. The neighborhood was close to the downtown business district, but far enough away from the hustle and bustle to accommodate spacious homes, large lawns, and broad streets. John E. Edmundson, like many of the people who moved to the fashionable new Avondale subdivision, was financially comfortable.

John Edmundson purchased the lot from the Greater Houston Improvement Company in 1912 for \$2,000. The deed specified that a home costing no less than \$3,000 be constructed at a setback of no less than 25 feet. Furthermore, no rental property or rooming house could be constructed. The house at 108 Stratford was one of only four houses existing on the south side of the 100 block of Stratford in 1912. By 1918, the south side of the block had seen significant change with the construction of other new houses at 110, 112, and 118 Stratford. The new homes constructed at 110 and 118 Stratford were owned by people employed in the oil business, a pattern that would increase in frequency throughout Avondale over the next few years.

John Edmundson, a native of Illinois, was born May 29, 1852. In the 1880s, he was listed as a farmer in Illinois. He married Isabenda (Isa) Merris, also of Illinois, in October 1877. They had two children between the years 1878 and 1882. The first child, a boy, was named Clyde M. Edmundson. A daughter named Mary I. Edmundson was born in 1881. Although John Edmundson was retired when he and his wife Isa purchased the lot at 108 Stratford, many of his neighbors were notables in Houston business. Sidney Lister, who lived at 103 Stratford, was a physician and surgeon in the Carter Building. Adolph Boldt at 105 Stratford was Secretary of the Houston Chamber of Commerce. John S. Stewart, President of Stewart Abstract Title Co., lived at 109 Stratford. Joseph F. Meyer Jr., who was a bookkeeper for the Mosehart and Keller Automobile Co., lived at 102 Stratford. Meyer was the son of Joseph Meyer, the President of the Houston Land and Trust Company, which was responsible for the development of Avondale and many of the other subdivisions in Montrose.

In 1918, the retired Edmundson did the unlikely and took a job as a porter at Foley Brothers Dry Goods. A porter was not a normal occupation among Avondale homeowners in 1918 when the neighborhood was a mix of the upper middle class. This could have been due to a number of reasons. There was a shortage in the labor force caused by the drafts of 1917 and 1918 for World War I and the influenza epidemic of 1918. It is likely, however, that Edmundson had simply fallen on difficult economic times. Edmundson sold his home in 1919 and moved to 715 Kipling Street in Montrose. Edmundson was listed as an elevator operator at Foley Bros. Dry Goods in the 1920-1921 Houston City Directory.

The home was purchased in 1919 by trustees of the Houston District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. William L. Clayton, M. Hutchinson, Walter W. Fondren, John Scott, and J. V. Dealy are named on the deed. The purchase price of \$11,000 was to be paid in three payments at seven percent interest and due two years from the date of instrument. The deed stipulated that the residence be maintained "as a place of residence for the use and occupancy of the presiding elder of the Houston District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, who may from time to time be appointed in said place, subject to the usage and discipline of said church as from time to time authorized and declared by the general conference of said church and by the annual conference whose bounds the said premises are situated." These trustees were a who's who of Houston business and social elite. William L. Clayton, a founding partner of the Anderson Clayton Cotton Co., held numerous appointments in the Federal government and is considered the father of the Marshall Plan. He was on the cover of *Time* magazine in August

1936. Houston philanthropist, Walter Fondren, was a partner in the Humble Oil Company and board member of the Houston Methodist Hospital. J. V. Dealy owned a printing company in Houston. John T. Scott was Treasurer of the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and father-in-law of Houston architect, James Ruskin Bailey. Scott was also instrumental in the development of the museum area neighborhood of Waverly Court. The aforementioned businessmen would later join with other Houston notables, like Jesse Jones and Judge James Elkins, under the leadership of Reverend Angie Frank Smith, to form the Methodist Hospital System, one of the largest hospital systems in the world.

The Methodist Hospital was created from the former Norsworthy Hospital, founded in 1908, and located at the corner of Rosalie Street at San Jacinto. Located next door to the Norsworthy Hospital was the Sarah Francelia Bell Home at 1111 Rosalie (extant City of Houston Landmark 2004). The Sarah Francelia Bell Home was constructed and funded by the Trust, established under her name for the purpose, as she requested, of providing living assistance for indigent widows of Methodist ministers in Houston. The Sarah Francelia Bell Trust was instrumental in keeping the Methodist Hospital solvent in its early years.

Beginning in 1920, the house at 108 Stratford was used exclusively as a home for the presiding church elders of the Methodist Episcopal Church located at 921 Mason. The first of six Methodist pastors, included Reverend George W. Davis, who lived there with his wife, Annie, and their son George Jr. Subsequent Methodist pastors who resided in the home were the Reverends C.T. Tally, J.W. Mills, R.W. Adams, Glenn Fling, and Horace Whaling. The home functioned as a parsonage for the Methodist Church from 1919 until 1943, when the home was again sold. The Bishop of the Houston District of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, Angie Frank Smith, lived around the corner at 104 Avondale during the 1930s.

The home was again sold in 1943 to Charles Buckner. The home would eventually be sold an additional three times in the next decade. The Elizondo family purchased the home in 1954 and retained ownership until 2001. The home was purchased by the Busick family in 2001 and underwent an extensive renovation approved by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission in 2002.

The house is a two-story, wood frame residence on a raised brick pier and beam foundation. The house features an eclectic blend of Prairie Style and American Foursquare elements. The main body of the home is American Foursquare in essence, but is augmented by a wraparound porch with a low, hipped roof, a more common feature of the Prairie school of architecture. The home's northern primary façade features a porch with a pediment over the multi-light transom and sidelight entry on the western edge of the house. The pedimented porch is echoed in the prominent gable end along the front roofline. This porch spans the entire front façade and continues southward at a ninety-degree angle along the eastern façade of the house. Windows are paired one-over-one pane wood sash windows. The front façade features two bays on both the first and second floors. The eastern façade is punctuated by three one-over-one pane windows of varying size and placement per floor. The southern façade has been reconfigured to include the sympathetic two-story addition to the rear of the building. This façade is gable ended like the front façade, but features an inset porch on both the first and second floors. The roof is gable ended with paired one-over-one wood frame windows in each of the two gable ends. One dormer with a single pane window is located on the eastern and western elevations and runs perpendicular to the main roofline. The western façade is similar to that of the eastern façade with the notable exception of a two-story bay with a bank of three connected two-over-two windows with transom lights above each.

RESTORATION HISTORY

The John E. Edmundson House/Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South was constructed in 1912 as a two-story, wood frame residence. The home is constructed in an eclectic blend of Prairie style and American Four Square architecture. Originally, and currently, a single-family residence, the structure was converted into multiple units during the Elizondo ownership between 1954 and 2001. During Elizondo ownership, much of the wraparound porch on the ground floor was enclosed and interior spaces were divided with partition walls to create additional living space. The 1998 architectural inventory of structures within the Avondale East Historic District classified the house as “potentially contributing”, due to its many unsympathetic, but reversible alterations, and poor overall condition.

In March 2002, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission granted a Certificate of Appropriateness for the restoration and sympathetic rear addition to the house. During this work, non-sympathetic additions and alterations were removed, and historic materials were repaired or replaced with matching materials, where needed. The enclosure to the original “L” shaped porch was removed, and the wooden balustrade and handrails were restored. Rotten wood siding was replaced with matching 117 wooden siding as original. A two-story addition was constructed to the rear of the home, which was built in the same style as the original portion of the home, and the addition utilized materials similar to those used elsewhere on the house, and features a gable roof extension of the original house.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harris County Deed Records 1910-1940. Vols. 271, 441, 442.

Houston City Directories; 1910-1960 Morrison Fourmy Publishing.

Houston Architectural Guide; The American Institute of Architects/ Houston Chapter & Herring Press 1990.

“Houston, Texas”; *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State History Association.

Houston Daily Post; May 25, 1907.

Johnston, Marguerite. *Houston, The Unknown City 1836-1946*; Texas A&M Press 1991.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. Maps Houston 1924-1950 Vol. 5 p. 544.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, and edited by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Protected Landmark Designation of the John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House–Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South at 108 Stratford Street.

HAHC ACTION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommended to Houston Planning Commission the Protected Landmark Designation of the John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House–Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South at 108 Stratford Street.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House–Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South at 108 Stratford Street.

PC ACTION

The Houston Planning Commission recommended to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the John E. and Isabenda Edmundson House–Parsonage of the Houston District, Methodist Episcopal Church South at 108 Stratford Street.

