

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Tom and Ingeborg Tellepsen House
OWNER: Steven E. Parker
APPLICANT: Same as Owner
LOCATION: 4518 Park Drive
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: Lf
HPO FILE NO.: 06PL30
DATE ACCEPTED: Oct-4-06
HAHC HEARING DATE: Oct-19-06
PC MEETING DATE: Oct-26-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 4 and parts of Lots 5 & 6, Block 31, Eastwood Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, stucco clad residence and two-story, stucco clad garage.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation for the residence and garage

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Tellepsen House, located at 4518 Park Drive, was originally constructed in 1916 and later expanded in 1923 by Tom Tellepsen. Tellepsen constructed the home as his own residence in the newly established Eastwood Addition, which was developed in 1911 by William A. Wilson. The unusual and extremely rare house type is classified as an airplane bungalow, and it features a prominent, cantilevered pediment entry which is supported and suspended from chains featuring oversized links. The house is not only an unusual example of architecture for the Eastwood Addition, but it remains a unique example for Houston as well. The Tellepsen House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 for designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Tellepsen House at 4518 Park Drive was built by Tom and Ingeborg Tellepsen in 1916. The home was constructed in the "airplane bungalow" style and, according to family descendants, it was constructed, at Ingeborg's request, to incorporate large windows. The two-story exterior is clad with cypress siding and a stucco finish. The front porch is cantilevered and supported by ship's chains, recalling the career that brought the builder to America per the family. The house also features for Houston, a very unusual and generously sized basement. "Mr. Tom," as he is called by his descendants, was a home builder and contractor and did a great deal of the work himself on his own home.

Tom and Ingeborg Tellepsen bought the lots at the corner of Park Drive and Maplewood Street (now Lockwood) in 1916, while Tellepsen was constructing Eastwood Elementary School, now known as Dora B. Lantrip Elementary School at 100 Telephone Road. According to family descendants, Tom Tellepsen fell in love with the Eastwood neighborhood. The oaks and pines of Park Drive reminded him of Norway. After the devastating hurricane of August 1915 uprooted trees and shattered the windows of their frail house, he decided to build a substantial house on the property in Eastwood. Maplewood Street was renamed and is now the northbound side of Lockwood Street. The side yard of the property extended across the current southbound Lockwood Street and esplanade.

Eastwood Addition had been developed by William A. Wilson in 1911. A site, near the center of the new subdivision, was donated by Wilson for the Eastwood Elementary School. The school was designed by Maurice Sullivan, then City Architect of Houston, and it was constructed by Tom Tellepsen. According to

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Stephen Fox, “designed in the Spanish mission style, with arcaded loggias and patios, it was described at the time of its construction as being the first school in Houston arranged on the ‘cottage plan,’ with classrooms occupying a series of free-standing pavilions.”

William A. Wilson also developed Woodland Heights in 1907, where he constructed his own home in 1910. Wilson’s home, located at 205 Bayland Avenue, is a large, Prairie influenced style home. The home is the most significant house and only example of its type, not only in Woodland Heights, but throughout all the adjacent Heights neighborhoods in North Houston. When it was built, and it remains even so today, the largest home on Woodland Heights’ main thoroughfare, Bayland Avenue, which Wilson lined with live oak trees. In fact his propensity for planting street trees, especially unusual for the developer of middle class neighborhoods, led to his appointment to the City of Houston’s first Board of Park Commissioners in 1910. (source: G. Randle Pace, “Houston Heights 1891-1991, A Historical Portrait and Contemporary Perspective”, 1991). Wilson’s sensitivity to tree planting would also inspire Tellepsen to relocate to Eastwood.

William A. Wilson, of Syracuse, New York, in 1892 was one of the first investors to tour the new development of the Omaha and South Texas Land Company, Houston Heights (NR Multiple Resource Area, 1984). He was so impressed with Houston Heights, and its future, that he moved there in 1893. He built many homes in Houston Heights, some of which still remain on Heights Boulevard, where he lived in a large home at 812 Heights (demolished) for many years. He was a member of the Houston Heights School Board in 1898, the Houston’s Parks Board, and in 1908, he was President of the Texas Christian Sanitarium (burned 1915) at 375 West 19th Street (formerly the Houston Heights Hotel). He also built many houses in other Houston neighborhoods, including Empire Addition and Hyde Park.

In 1907 he created the William A. Wilson Realty Company, bought 106 acres of land just east of Houston Heights, laid out 600 lots and built numerous homes in the Craftsman bungalow style. When Wilson developed the Eastwood subdivision in 1911, just south of downtown Houston, he also constructed a few homes there on speculation, and even today, a few examples still exist for the same house that is found in both neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods showcase a huge collection of Craftsman and Prairie style homes. Wilson also deed restricted his new developments as to use, one of the earliest uses of this type of document to maintain neighborhood character. Wilson also published a magazine for several years, called “Homes”, which not only promoted his building projects but also contained articles oriented to the general interest of new homeowners.

Tom Tellepsen, who built 4518 Park Drive in the Eastwood Addition, was born in Tvedestrand, Norway, in April 1888. His descendants relate that after starting his working life as a cabin boy on a sailing ship at the age of 14, Tellepsen passed the exam to become a captain less than two years later. It was customary to purchase stock in a shipping company before becoming their captain. He decided to come to America, land of opportunity, to earn the funds. He landed at Ellis Island one month after his 17th birthday in 1905.

His first job in New York was as a carpenter, following in his late father’s footsteps. He was quickly promoted due to his great skill, and he also was allowed to apprentice in other construction disciplines. One of his early projects was building the concession stands at Coney Island. Later, while working on a housing project, he learned the skilled and exacting tasks of home building, including the art of cabinetwork. He also learned about an excellent opportunity for work, when in 1906, he left for Panama to work on the construction of the Panama Canal. It was while in Panama that he was able to earn and save enough money to become financially established in only one short year.

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The family further relates that while Tellepsen was working on the Panama Canal, the conditions there were very harsh. In late 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt set up a commission to determine why the cost of the Canal was higher than expected. During the investigation, it was also determined that the housing and working conditions for the workers had to be improved, which they were, resulting in more US citizens applying for the high-paying jobs. Tom decided to return to the United States to file for citizenship. When he did, he found that the immigration laws had changed, and he couldn't return to Panama for five years. He decided to move to a growing area, and chose to move to Houston in 1908.

After living in Pasadena, Texas, through 1909 while working on various construction projects, he returned to Houston in 1910. His family relates that Tellepsen worked on house construction sketches in his spare time. Deciding to receive more formal training, he enrolled in an architectural drawing course at the Y.M.C.A. After the third session, his teacher was so impressed with his work that she persuaded Tellepsen to allow the school to have his plans published in the Houston newspaper. The Houston Land Corporation bought Tellepsen's house plan for their new development, Montrose Place. They also hired Tellepsen to build the house, which is still standing and is now the offices of the History Department at St. Thomas University on Yoakum Boulevard.

By this time, he had steady employment and had established himself in the construction and the remodeling of homes. His family descendants tell the story the he took the White Star Liner from New York to Liverpool, and then to Norway, where he asked Ingeborg Lawson to become his wife. They were married on August 1, 1912 in Tvedestrand, and they sailed to Galveston where took the new interurban to Houston. For ten dollars a month, the newlyweds rented a house at 1506 Palmer, off Leeland Street. Upon their return, Tellepsen went into business for himself as a building contractor, and later in 1914, he formed a partnership with Andrew Ness. On December 17, 1915, Tellepsen became a United States citizen. In 1923, while his wife and three children were spending the summer visiting the family in Norway, Tellepsen extensively remodeled the house when he added the second floor. In 1929, he turned his contracting business into the Tellepsen Construction Company, which became one of Houston's largest construction companies

Through the years, Tom Tellepsen built many of Houston's landmark structures, including: First Baptist Church in Downtown Houston (1921; demolished), Miller Memorial Theater in Hermann Park (1922; demolished), the Manchester Wharfs (1922), Rice Institute Chemistry Building (1923), Palmer Memorial Church (1924), Gray and Temple Masonic Lodge (1924), Brazos River Bridge (1925), Ellington Field (1940), the Shamrock Hilton (1949; demolished) as well as others, including: the Melrose Building downtown, the Schlumberger complex on I-45, the Medical Center-Medical Tower Building, and the Children's and St. Luke's Hospitals. He also chartered and built the East End State Bank on Leeland Street (now the City of Houston Water Department).

Tellepsen Construction Company also built Church of the Redeemer (1952) at 4411 Dallas Avenue in Tellepsen's Eastwood neighborhood. According to Stephen Fox, Tellepsen was a parishioner of Redeemer, and "built a new church based on a vision he had had in a dream. At the time of its construction, the concrete building was described as the first windowless church in Houston. It was centrally air-conditioned and the nave was illuminated with concealed fluorescent lighting. Behind the altar is William Orth's mural 'Christ of the Workingman.'" Tom and Ingeborg Tellepsen lived in their Park Drive home until 1971. When Tellepsen passed away in 1975, many of Houston's business leaders were joined by community leaders and many Eastwood neighbors of Tellepsen at his funeral services held at his beloved Church of the Redeemer. According to his family descendants, his home designs became a guide for many of the homes built in Montrose. His strong construction skills and ethics earned him the respect as a trusted builder and international businessman. Tellepsen also had a very close personal relationship with his employees,

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neighbors, and business contacts, and he “left a personal legacy in Houston as solid as any building he constructed.”

RESTORATION HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION

In 1923, Tellepsen remodeled the house and added a second story. The current living room was expanded to include both the original living and dining rooms.

According to family descendants, the original window that overlooks the porte cochere and pond on the east elevation was the first use of large plate glass in a residence in Houston, and possibly the U.S. When the house was first built, all of the wood floors were stained. As part of the remodel, wall-to-wall wool carpeting was installed throughout the house.

The 1923 build-out included a standard staircase leading to the second floor. An additional bathroom was constructed upstairs toward the front of the house and features an early example of residential glass block used as a long, narrow horizontal window.

Since Mr. Tellepsen worked on several significant construction projects in Houston, he used some of the surplus materials in his home. One of his most prominent projects was the Shamrock Hilton Hotel. Among the surplus materials from the Shamrock used in the Tellepsen home are a magnificent carved Italian marble fireplace mantle and mahogany paneling in the den, stairway, and two of the bedrooms. The paneling has been painted with the exception of the paneling in the den. When the Tellepsens donated the house to the Eastwood Baptist Church in 1972, Tom’s granddaughter, Karen Tellepsen, was charged with preparing it for the transfer. She knew that her grandfather had loved the paneling, so she fashioned fabric wall coverings from sheets which incorporated elaborate cording which was installed over the paneling to protect it from being removed or destroyed. She was amazed to enter the house in July 2005 and find the sheets still adorning the protected den walls.

Sometime in the 1950s, as more grandchildren were born into the family, they no longer could fit around the table in the dining room. Tellepsen wanted everyone to be able to sit around the same table, so he extended the dining room out an additional six feet to the west. The masonry exterior of the extension of his home matched the type of finish he used in a build-out at the Church of the Redeemer in the 1950s.

Each of the bathrooms are entirely tiled, including the ceilings. The original bathroom downstairs has an extra large cast iron tub. Mrs. Tellepsen’s bathroom upstairs was updated to include a beautiful pink Art Deco sink and toilet. Her initials form the vents in the clothes hamper in the bathroom. This is the bathroom with the glass bricks above the bathtub. The bedroom next to the bathroom has a large walk-in cedar closet. Prior to a remodel in the 1950s, the bathroom could be accessed through the back of the closet. (This was granddaughter Karen Tellepsen’s favorite route during hide-n-seek.)

Most of the original radiators are also still installed in the house, with the furnace in the basement.

The garage apartment is also original to the property. It was constructed with balloon framing with 2 x 6 beams that are 20 feet long from the floor to the roof of the garage apartment. These timbers were from old growth lumber which is no longer available except through salvage. Tellepsen also didn’t skimp on the support beams for the construction of the main house either. Instead of using the customary 2 x 6s or 2 x 8s, he used 6 x 8s. In fact, when Tellepsen went to the Lumbermen’s National Bank to finance the construction of his home, the family relates that the manager was startled at the elaborate plans and the exorbitant cost of

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\$4,000. After much persuading, Mr. Murray, the loan officer, helped him get the loan through the Great Southern Life Insurance Company.

When the city acquired the side yard for expansion of Lockwood Street, Tellepsen relocated many of the old trees and one of the ponds elsewhere on the property. The concrete fence on the east property line was also moved from its original location along Maplewood. Originally the driveway to the garage ran along the back of the property which was accessed by Maplewood, with a shorter limestone drive leading to the porte cochere and front entrances.

The grounds still contain some of the original magnolias that Mrs. Tellepsen planted. The fountains, which will be restored, feature waterfalls constructed by Tom Tellepsen himself. His handiwork is also evident in the concrete “rocks” and “wooden” concrete bridge that he created.

The information and sources for this application were edited and supplemented by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Flynn, Andrea K. Tom Tellepsen: Builder & Believer.

A Biography, The Anson Jones Press Salado, Texas, c. 1956.

Pace, G. Randle, “Houston Heights 1891-1991, A Historical Portrait and Contemporary Perspective,” 1991.

Personal Interviews with:

Grover and Nancy Newman (previous owners), May 6, 2005 and June 24, 2005.

Bill England, President, Eastwood Historical Commission (about May 8, 2005).

George Sondheim, inspector, May 26, 2005.

Karen Tellepsen on June 22, 2005 and July 3, 2005 (and subsequent other times).

June Tellepsen (Mrs. Howard Tellepsen) on July 3, 2005.

Virginia Hancock, Historian – Houston Country Club Place Civic Club.

Anna Mod, Historic Preservationist.

Additional conversations with numerous current and former neighbors, and childhood friends of Tom Tellepsen’s children and grandchildren held at a community porch crawl and open house on July 3, 2006, and the 2005 Home Tour, October 22 & 23, 2005, including, among others: Bob & Suzette Priut, long-time Eastwood residents, Sonny Preston, neighbor, Phyllis Maloney, neighbor, Tom Stringer, Howard Tellepsen’s childhood friend, W. R. Gordon, neighbor, and Marl Anne Preston, neighbor.

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

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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 |
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- (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;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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.
- The property was constructed before 1905;
- 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;
- The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission recommend to the Houston City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation for the Tom and Ingeborg Tellepsen House at 4518 Park Drive.

SITE LOCATION MAP TOM AND INGEBOG TELLEPSEN HOUSE 4518 PARK DRIVE. NOT TO SCALE

