

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Robert L. and Dena Cole House

OWNER: Gwynn Piccolo

APPLICANT: Same as owner

LOCATION: 945 Harvard Street – Houston Heights

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: III.c

HPO FILE NO: 06PL35

DATE ACCEPTED: Dec-07-06

HAHC HEARING DATE: Dec-21-06

PC HEARING DATE: Jan-4-07

SITE INFORMATION:

Lots 1 and 2, Block 230, Houston Heights Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The buildings on the site include a one-and-a-half story, historic wood frame residence and a non-contributing two-story garage apartment.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Robert L. and Dena Cole House at 945 Harvard Street is located within the boundaries of the Houston Heights, which was designated a Multiple Resources Area (MRA) by the National Register Program on June 22, 1983. The Cole House was built in 1908 in the bungalow style and rebuilt with Craftsman influences in 1916 after a kitchen fire destroyed parts of the home. Robert Cole was involved in the legal profession his entire life and was raised in a family of attorneys. Cole worked for a number of prominent law firms during the early 20th century and eventually became the City Attorney for the Houston Heights, which was still an independent municipality at that time. Robert L. Cole and his brother John Cole eventually founded the law firm of Cole and Cole. Robert and Dena Cole's two sons Robert Cole Jr. and Richard Ray Cole eventually became lawyers themselves. Robert Cole Jr. served as judge for the City of Bellaire, Texas. The Cole family owned the house at 945 Harvard Street until the early 1960s. The house qualifies for designation under Criteria 1, 3, and 5.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Robert L. and Dena Cole House located at 945 Harvard Street was constructed in 1908 for Houston attorney Robert Cole and his family. Cole's father, Robert Pollack Cole, had been an attorney in Paris, Tennessee, from 1872 until 1903. Robert L. Cole started his long legal career in 1904 as a stenographer in the office of Andrews & Ball Attorneys-at-Law. The two law partners were notable Houston figures. Frank Andrews lived in one of the large mansions on Main Street and Thomas H. Ball was later a congressman and the namesake of Tomball, Texas. Robert L. Cole added the titles of attorney and notary to his vitae in the Houston City Directory of 1905-06 and worked in the law firm of Hunt and Meyer, whose partners were Wilmer S. Hunt and Sterling Meyer.

In 1907, Cole went into practice with law partner Asa R. Wilson. The law firm of Wilson and Cole was in existence from 1907 until 1912, when Robert Cole and Asa Wilson added John F. Cole, Robert Cole's brother, to the partnership. John Cole lived in a large house at 103 Avondale. The law firm of Cole, Wilson, and Cole existed until 1918, when Robert and John Cole parted ways from Asa Wilson in order to form Cole and Cole Attorneys-at-Law.

Robert L. and Dena Kuypers Cole moved to the Houston Heights in 1908 where they lived in a house at 1412 Harvard, presumably while the house at 945 Harvard was under construction. The Cole family moved into the newly completed home at 945 Harvard the following year. In 1911, Robert Cole became the City Attorney for the Houston Heights, which was still an independent municipality at that time. He would hold this position until 1917. Robert L. Cole died in 1948.

Robert L. Cole Jr. was born in 1909 and followed in the family tradition of law practice. According to his obituary in February 2002, Robert L. Cole Jr. was “an attorney from a family of attorneys...”. He was a member of both the local and state bar associations. During the 1930s, Robert Cole Jr. was president of the Harris County Democrats and later served as judge for the independent municipality of Bellaire, Texas. Richard Ray Cole, Robert Cole Jr.’s brother, also practiced law in Houston from 1939 until 1960.

Houston Heights was designated a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) because it was at one time an independent municipality. Within its original boundaries are numerous buildings 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 later 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. The neighborhood also contains the original city hall of Houston Heights (also the fire station and jail). Also located there are a number of historic churches, theatres, corner stores, private and public parks, and schools.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Houston Heights first developed in 1891 as an independent suburban Houston municipality. Structures constructed in the Houston Heights during the initial phases of development are of the late-Victorian period, and include both high style architect-designed homes and folk Victorian cottages. During the early 20th century, a new trend in residential architecture began to emerge in the Houston Heights, as the bungalow style became very popular across America. The Robert L. and Dena Cole House, constructed in 1908, was designed in the bungalow style with a low-pitched roof, prominent dormers, and wrap-around porch. The house represents two phases of construction – the house was originally designed with a blend of late Queen Anne style and Craftsmen influence, but a kitchen fire in 1915-1916 necessitated that the house be partially re-built. Although the fire damage was extensive, significant portions of the 1908 structure survived and were incorporated into the new design. One of the most notable features to have survived the 1916 fire was the entry way and shallow projecting bay on the southeast corner of the home. The entry is a transom and sidelight configuration with three fixed panes in the transom lights and one fixed pane per sidelight. During the 1916 remodeling/reconstruction, the home received a more heavily Craftsmen influenced makeover.

The most notable difference between the 1908 appearance and the post-1916 appearance of the structure is the addition of a half-story beneath a taller, gable-ended roof. A prominent front facing dormer was incorporated into the new roof design and is centered facing Harvard Street. A matching dormer is centered along the rear roofline and faces the rear property line of the home. During roof reconstruction, the formerly “L” shaped front porch was reconfigured as well. The original front porch had been “L” shaped and was supported by classic round wood columns. The post-fire front porch was shortened to span only the front portion of the home and the

side porch of the original "L" shaped section was enclosed to create more living space. At this time skirting around the base of the home was changed from wooden shingles to a more substantial masonry skirting. The masonry detailing was also repeated in the new, and more massive, front porch columns that were built to support the added weight of the more substantial roof structure. The windows in the home are of the multi "diamond" light pane over one single pane wood sash variety.

Because of the difference between the 1908 photograph and a post-1916 photograph of the Cole House, the home was erroneously listed as non-contributing during the neighborhood survey for the Houston Heights Multiple Resources National Register District. The home, however, maintains a high degree of architectural integrity. The current owners have worked to restore elements of the home that were altered during its later years when the structure was used as a retail location called the Glass Factory and later as the Unification Church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Agatha, Sister M., History of Houston Heights 1891 – 1912, Premier Printing Company, Houston, Texas, 1956.
Houston City Directories; 1900-1930, Morrison-Fourmy publishing.

Houston Heights View Book, circa 1910.

Interview with Robert Cole Jr. by Gwynn Piccolo 1992.

Johnston, Marguerite, Houston the Unknown City 1836-1946, Texas A&M University Press 1991.

Pace, G. Randle and Deborah Markey, Houston Heights, A Historical Portrait and A Contemporary Perspective 891 – 1991, Tribune Publishing, Houston, Texas, 1991.

The information and sources for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

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

- (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.

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 Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to the Houston Planning Commission the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Robert L. and Dena Cole House at 945 Harvard Street.

SITE LOCATION MAP
ROBERT L. AND DENA COLE HOUSE
945 HARVARD STREET
NOT TO SCALE



