

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Walter Boyd House
OWNER: Mark B. and Cynthia W. Davis
APPLICANT: Same as Owner
LOCATION: 3424 Wickersham Lane - River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IIc
HPO FILE NO.: 07L176
DATE ACCEPTED: April-8-07
HAHC HEARING: Apr-25-07
PC HEARING: May-10-07

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 18, Block 62, River Oaks Section 7, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes an historic two-story residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The house at 3424 Wickersham Lane was built as a speculative home by Robert D. McCready, an architect and active River Oaks builder. Since its completion, the house has been owned by only two families, the Boyds and the Williams. Walter Boyd was an attorney and served as City Attorney and Special Council to Mayor Oscar Holcombe. He was the son-in-law of Congressmen Joe Henry Eagle, who also lived in the home during the Boyd family's ownership. Congressman Eagle served in the U. S. House of Representatives from 1913-1921 and from 1933-1937, and was the father of Virginia Eagle Boyd. Among his many accomplishments, Congressman Eagle was instrumental in the establishment of Ellington Air Force Base in 1917. The house qualifies for Landmark Designation under criteria 1, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The house at 3424 Wickersham Lane was built as a speculative home in 1939 by Robert D. McCready. Walter E. and Virginia Boyd purchased the house in November 1939 and moved in with their two children, Marilyn and Walter E. Boyd, Jr. Virginia and Walter Boyd had two additional children, Joe and Virginia Boyd, who were also raised in the home.

Walter Boyd (1905-1964) was a native Houstonian who served in the Army Air Force in World War II in India and in the Pacific Theater. He practiced law for many years, and the 1939 City Directory shows his practice in the Shell building. In November 1939, when he purchased the home, River Oaks Magazine noted:

“Mr. and Mrs. Walter E. Boyd and their two children are now located in their new residence at 3424 Wickersham Lane. The home is Colonial, of white painted brick and has dark red shutters, which are beginning to vie in popularity with traditional green. An enormous pine tree adds its protective beauty to the charm of this home and becomes a part of the architectural effect.”

According to Joe Boyd, his father, Walter, worked as a City Attorney from 1947-1948 and as Special Counsel to the Mayor from 1956-1957. All of his service to the City was under Mayor Oscar Holcombe. Joe Boyd recalls his parents' close relationship with their neighbors, the Sumners. Reverend Tom Sumners was the Rector at St. John the Divine for many years and was very well known in the community. All of the Boyd children were raised in the home, and all graduated from Lamar High School, which was within easy walking distance.

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Joe Boyd also has memories of his grandfather, Congressman Joe Henry Eagle, who lived in the home for the last eight years of his life. He recalls his grandfather sitting out on the front lawn smoking cigars and enjoying the afternoon paper. According to the Texas Handbook Online:

“Joe Henry Eagle, congressman, was born in Tompkinsville, Kentucky, on January 23, 1870. Eagle moved to Houston in 1895 and ran unsuccessfully for Congress as a Populist in 1896. Later he served six terms in Congress as a Democrat, under Woodrow Wilson from 1913 to 1921 and under Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1933 to 1937. While in the House, he was a strong advocate of credit for farmers and of the resulting Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916. He also secured the establishment of Ellington Air Force Base in 1917 and an appropriation of \$4,000,000 to deepen and widen the Houston Ship Channel in 1919. In the 1930s, as earlier, he advocated social security benefits and promoted the construction of several Work Projects Administration buildings in his district. In 1936 he ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination for United States senator, then retired from Congress for a second time to practice law in Houston until 1957. He married Mary Hamman, daughter of William H. Hamman, and they had a son and a daughter. Eagle died on January 10, 1963.”

Congressman Eagle died at the age of 92 in his room at the home located at 3424 Wickersham Lane. In 1963, the Boyds sold the house to Walter and Betty Williams, the parents of Cynthia Williams Davis, who is the current owner with her husband, Brad Davis. Walter Williams was born in Waco and graduated from Texas A&M University. He came to Houston in 1954, and in 1964, founded Texoil Company. He currently serves as Vice Chairman of Cheniere Energy. In 1996, Cynthia and Brad Davis purchased the home from her parents for their family.

Robert DeClarke McCready (1900-1974) was an architect and builder active from 1925 until the early 1940s. He first appears in the Houston City Directory in 1922 with his home listed as 1619 Cortlandt. McCready was a draftsman for the architectural firm of Henry F. Jonas & Tabor, R.D. Steele from 1925 through 1931, and the River Oaks Corporation. Starting in 1934, he is listed as a sole proprietor in the architectural section of the City Directory.

It appears that McCready's career shifted over time from architecture to remodeling and then to building speculative homes. In the first issue of River Oaks Magazine in February 1937, he advertises home repairing, remodeling and “concealed lawn – sprinkling systems” services. Around 1938, McCready began to expand his business to building speculative homes. In many cases, he used the exact same floor plans for separate homes. In fact, in an effort to track down the builder of the Boyd home, the current owner went to the River Oaks Property Owners’ file of a home that reportedly had an identical floor plan, 3412 Wickersham. The plans were indeed the same. McCready also appeared to adapt plans from other cities. An April 1939 advertisement for 3404 Meadow Lake Lane talks about adapting a plan from a Los Angeles, California, home that had won the American Gas Association All-Gas Home Architectural Competition. Through the years, McCready's office locations included 2506 River Oaks Boulevard, 4524 Kirby Drive, 3812 Revere Street, and 2031 West Gray (the River Oaks Shopping Center at the corner of West Gray and Shepherd).

The McCready homes were simple and compact in size and style and usually included three bedrooms and two baths. This size and style of home was marketed as affordable to the mid-level buyer. Based on advertisements in River Oaks Magazine, the following houses are attributed to Robert McCready:

- 3457 Locke Lane, 1939
- 2041 Claremont, 1939
- 3452 Ella Lee, 1939
- 3404 Meadow Lake Lane, 1939
- 3448 Wickersham, 1939
- 3424 Wickersham

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- 2146 Pelham, 1939
- 3453 Meadow Lake Lane, 1939
- 3112 Revere, 1939
- 2203 Claremont, 1939
- 2203 Stanmore, 1939
- 2204 Nebraska, 1939
- 2212 Mimosa, 1939
- 2206 Mimosa, 1939
- 2202 Mimosa, 1939
- 2208 Mimosa, 1939
- 2445 Stanmore, 1940
- 3420 Meadow Lake Lane, 1940
- 2345 Stanmore, 1940
- 2328 Timber Lane, 1940
- 3650 Meadow Lake Lane, 1940

At the end of 1939, McCready started to advertise his services as a consultant. In fact, he advertised a “home building clinic” helping people with carpentry, painting, plumbing and other home services. McCready died in October 1974 in Fort Davis, Texas.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The 1939 McCready house located at 3424 Wickersham was designed and constructed in the Colonial Revival style. The home features a masonry first floor capped by a shingled second story with a low hipped roof. The home features twelve-over-twelve paned, wood sash windows on the first floor and an unusual combination of six-over-six paned, wood sash windows flanked by vertical two over two windows on the second story. Originally, the home was white, painted brick with red shutters; today the brick is gray with white trim. Over time, the home has undergone minimal change, and the original footprint of the home remains the same. On the façade, the changes from the original appearance include, enclosing the screened porch and an early alteration, which covered the original clapboard on the second floor of the home with cedar shingles.

The current owners are in the initial phase of a renovation of 3424 Wickersham. The plans call for the following: updating all bathrooms and the kitchen; connecting the home to the garage by way of an enclosed solarium; adding a new master bath and closet space above the existing den; and adding an en-suite bathroom to the back bedroom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Houston Chronicle, Walter Boyd Obituary, September 13, 1964.

Interview with Joe Boyd and Cynthia Davis by Kelley Trammell.

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/EE/fea1.html> (accessed April 9, 2007).

River Oaks Magazine, Volumes 1 through 6, for information on Robert McCready.

River Oaks Magazine, “Neighbors”, November 1939.

U.S. Social Security Death Index, Robert McCready and Walter Boyd.

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

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Walter Boyd House at 3424 Wickersham.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
WALTER BOYD HOUSE
3424 WICKERSHAM
NOT TO SCALE

