

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Frederic L. Bouknight House

**OWNERS:** Walter and Nancy Bratic

**APPLICANTS:** Walter and Nancy Bratic

**LOCATION:** 3023 Ella Lee Lane – River Oaks

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

**AGENDA ITEM:** II.b

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Mar-12-2008

**HPO FILE NO.:** 08PL64

**HAHC HEARING:** May-15-2008

**PC HEARING:** May-22-2008

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 13 and Tract 14A, Block B, Avalon Place Section 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site includes a two-story brick residence.

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

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The house at 3023 Ella Lee Lane was built in 1939-1940 for Frederic Bouknight and his wife, Edith. Bouknight was a prominent oilman and business associate of the legendary independent oilman, T. P. Lee, and served as the executor of Lee's estate. The Bouknight house was built by the C. C. Rouse Company, which is still in business and is now known as the Tynes Sparks Building Corporation. Wylie Vale, the architect of the house, designed scores of buildings in Houston in an architectural career spanning 1939 to 2001. The two-story Bouknight house is French Eclectic in style, with traditional red brick and a steeply pitched hipped roof. The Frederic L. Bouknight House qualifies for Protected Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 6.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Frederic L. Bouknight purchased the lot at 3023 Ella Lee Lane from developer William Dickey on September 26, 1938, for \$4000. Bouknight executed a mechanic's lien in favor of local builder C. C. Rouse on October 10, 1939, which provided that Rouse would construct a residence on the lot for a total price of \$13,400. Architect Wylie W. Vale, who worked at the time with C. C. Rouse's company, designed the house.

Rouse's records describe the Bouknight house as an eight-room, two-story, brick veneer house with plaster walls. The original hand-written cost records of the home show that the construction cost to C. C. Rouse was \$11,208.50. Some of the costs of the home included: the foundation at \$275, the curbwork and driveway at \$350, the attic fan at \$125, and the central heating system at \$288. Rouse usually spent a considerable amount of money on light fixtures for the houses he built. The original house probably had a wrought iron stair railing, based on the cost of the wrought iron work for the house. The bill for wrought iron was \$160 in 1939, which was a considerable sum of money, and much more than the price of the wrought iron on the front porch.

Frederic Leon Bouknight (1894-1947) was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, and moved to Houston in 1901. He was a prominent oilman and spent over 30 years working with T. P. Lee Interests. Thomas Peter Lee, or T. P. Lee, was an early Houston oilman, investor, and president of the Yount-Lee Oil Company. Lee was born on March 19, 1871, in Petroleum, West Virginia. In 1903, he moved to Saratoga, Texas, where he worked for the newly formed Texas Company, which eventually became Texaco. While there, Lee became friends with J. S. Cullinan, and the two, along with Emerson F. Woodward, Will C. Hogg, and James L. Autry, joined in 1914 to form the Farmers Petroleum Company, of which Lee became

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president. In 1916, Lee, Cullinan, Woodward, and other associates organized the American Republics Corporation that later controlled twenty-one subsidiaries involved in all facets of the oil industry. The relationship between Lee and Cullinan soured, however, and in 1914, Lee invested in a partnership with wildcatter Miles Franklin Yount to form the Yount-Lee Oil Company. Yount-Lee was described as “one of the most successful independent oil producers of its day.” The Yount-Lee Company made national news in 1926 by rediscovering oil in the famed Spindletop Field near Beaumont. In 1924, Lee refused the Texas Republican Party’s nomination for governor of Texas. T. P. Lee died on February 4, 1939. Lee’s home on Montrose Boulevard, known as the Link-Lee Mansion (National Register, COH Landmark), today serves as the administration building for the University of St. Thomas.

Frederic Bouknight was executor of the T. P. Lee estate; secretary-treasurer of the Fin-Kerr Oil & Gas Production Company and the Tri-County Gas Company, both of Holcomb, Kansas; and had interests in numerous other oil and real estate holdings in Kansas and Texas. His community activities included membership in the Holland Lodge No. 1, Ruthven commandery of the Knights Templar, and the Arabia Temple Shrine. He died at age 53 in November 1947, and was buried in Glenwood Cemetery near the grave of his old associate, T. P. Lee.

After Bouknight's death, his widow, Edith, continued to live in the home until 1953-54, when she sold the house to Edwin and Catherine Brown. The Brown family sold the house around 1966-67 to Dr. Jack and Mrs. Jane Southern, who sold it to Bruce and Martha Gaylor around 1971-72. The Gaylors sold it to Nancy and Walter Bratic, the current owners, in December 1989.

Wylie Walker Vale, the architect of the Bouknight home, was born in Marcelline, Missouri, in 1916. He graduated from Rice Institute with a B.S. in Architecture in 1939. From 1936-1940, he worked with Houston architects Harvin Moore & Hermon Lloyd. After graduation, Vale worked with engineer R. J. Cummins and his in-house architect Frank Zumwalt (1941), and later worked for architect Travis Broesche (1945-47). He established the firm of Broesche & Vale (1945-47) that later became Rustay, Martin & Vale (1950s-1970).

Vale built or designed many homes in Memorial, Tanglewood and River Oaks, and in many different styles. The home designed for Bouknight reflects the early pre-war years of Vale’s architecture. Vale is probably best known for the modernist style he developed after World War II, when he created many homes in Tanglewood and Memorial in his “Contemporary Country” style. One-story homes built of wood, brick and stacked stone and sporting flat or low-pitched roofs were Vale's specialty. He also designed nonresidential buildings such as churches and schools, but his primary practice was in residential architecture. Wylie W. Vale designed more than 450 homes during his practice, including homes for such Houstonians as Roy Cullen, Gus Wortham, Fred Heyne, George Lewis, Tyson Smith Jr., Jack Roach Jr., and Jimmy Green. His work was featured in the *Houston Chronicle* and *Architectural Digest*. Throughout his career, he designed homes with the owner in mind as shown by this quote in *Properties* magazine:

“It was my plan,” he says, “to design and build completely up-to-date, practical, informal and livable homes. It gave me immense satisfaction to help clients plan and build beautiful cheerful homes to house their most precious possessions – wives and children. I designed a number of churches, schools and other buildings including the original Lakewood Church and the new River Oaks Country Club, but my first career love was my residential practice.”

After 62 years in practice in Houston, Vale retired in 2001, and moved to Austin with his wife Alliene. His son, Wylie W. Vale, Jr., is an award-winning biochemist at the Salk Institute.

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Claude Clay Rouse, or C. C. Rouse, the builder of the house at 3023 Ella Lee Lane, was born in Pleasant Valley, Oklahoma, in February 1897. He resided in Houston for sixty years and founded the C. C. Rouse Company, which survives today as Tynes Sparks Building Corporation. The company started as Rouse Lumber & Building Company on Montrose Blvd, and went on to build many homes in River Oaks, Riverside, and Tanglewood neighborhoods. Rouse often reused the same basic designs for his houses and customized them by adding or subtracting elements according to the owner's desires and financial ability. Some of the other C. C. Rouse homes built in River Oaks include:

- 3612 Ella Lee
- 3602 Wickersham
- 2136 Brentwood Drive (COH Landmark)
- 2429 Brentwood Drive
- 2504 Brentwood Drive
- 3609 Inwood Drive
- 3671 Inwood Drive
- 3719 Inwood Drive
- 3215 Locke Lane
- 3469 Piping Rock Lane
- 3646 Piping Rock Lane
- 3014 Del Monte Drive
- 3627 Del Monte Drive
- 3663 Del Monte Drive
- 3637 Olympia
- 3814 Chevy Chase

According to the Tynes Sparks website, “Rouse was confident in his idea for building a spec home in River Oaks. One of the company’s business mottos was to take the party out of the country club and bring it home to a mansion. Floor plans of C. C. Rouse homes were designed so that 100 people at a time could gather and circulate in the home with ease. Bedrooms were separated from the main living areas for privacy. Kitchens were built to handle the preparation of major social events. Living rooms featured palatial detailing.”

Rouse's son-in-law, Tynes Sparks, joined the business in 1948, and took it over in 1966 when Rouse retired. C. C. Rouse died in Houston in October 1979.

### **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

The 1939-1940 Bouknight home designed by Wylie Vale is French Eclectic in style. The home is two stories with traditional red brick and a steeply pitched hipped roof. Brick quoins decorate all corners of the house. The main section of the home is symmetrical with four eight-over-eight double-hung windows on each floor. The main entryway is elegant with an original pedimented metal hood supported with wrought iron posts creating a small porch by the entry. The front door boasts its original leaded glass sidelights. Above the door is a lovely arched window of leaded glass.

Over the years, the home has undergone some changes, none of which has impacted the façade. In the 1970s, a master bathroom was added to the back of the house where a screened porch had been located, and the kitchen and other bathrooms were remodeled. In 1997-98, the present owners expanded the family room and remodeled the exterior of the 1970s rear addition to create a more architecturally compatible addition with the original house. The original sunroom on the back of the house was expanded to create a family room, and a master closet and laundry room were added. The kitchen, bathrooms, and library were remodeled. The architect for the addition was Patton W. Brooks, AIA; the interior designer was Michaux Thomas; and the contractor was Pace Development and Construction Co.

The owners were able to locate the manufacturer of the house’s original brick, Acme Brick Company in Bridgeport, Texas, and the same brick was used for the addition. This particular brick is used on First Presbyterian Church in the Museum District, and numerous other River Oaks houses of that era. Because the original mahogany front door, which contains an oval window, was in poor repair, the owners had an exact replica built. The home retains its original leaded glass around the front door and in the arched

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window above the front door, the mantle for the living room fireplace, the pocket doors separating the dining room and living room, and the plaster walls and arched doorways on the first floor, as well as most of the original features upstairs. The original two-story garage and servants quarters have been preserved.

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

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

C. C. Rouse records, courtesy of Tynes Sparks.

Harris County Contract Records, Vol 347, Pg 410; Vol 727, Pg 112.

Harris County Deed Records, Vol 1105, Pg 472.

*Houston Chronicle*, C.C. Rouse Obituary, October 28, 1979.

Obituary of Frederic Leon Bouknight, 1947, Glenwood Cemetery Archives.

Obituary of T. P. Lee, 1939, Glenwood Cemetery Archives.

Personal Notes of Stephen Fox on Wylie Vale.

*Properties Magazine*, Volume 6, 2005.

Telephone conversation between Nancy Bratic & Mr. Tynes Sparks, February 27, 2008.

Tynes Sparks website, <http://www.tynessparks.com/>

Wikipedia, biography of Thomas P. Lee.

<http://www.houstonarchitecture.info/haif/index.php?showtopic=10882>.

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

**S**    **NA**

**S - satisfies**    **NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(1);
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event (Sec. 33-224(a)(2);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(3);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(4);

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- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);
- (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 (Sec. 33-224(a)(6);
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present (Sec. 33-224(a)(7);
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride (Sec. 33-224(a)(8).

### AND

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b).

### OR

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

### OR

- The property is 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 (Sec. 33-229(a)(3);

### OR

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4).

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Frederic L. Bouknight House at 3023 Ella Lee Lane.

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FREDERIC L. BOUKNIGHT HOUSE  
3023 ELLA LEE LANE



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SITE LOCATION MAP  
FREDERIC L. BOUKNIGHT HOUSE  
3023 ELLA LEE LANE  
NOT TO SCALE

