

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Richardson House

OWNER: Magnificat Houses, Inc.

APPLICANT: Same as Owner

LOCATION: 3307 Austin Street

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: VII

HPO FILE NO: 08PL66

DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-22-08

HAHC HEARING DATE: Aug-13-08

PC HEARING DATE: Aug-28-08

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 9 and parts of Lots 8 and 10, Cedar Lawn Addition, northwest half of Holman Lot #39, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site is located in the middle of the Cedar Lawn subdivision and fronts Austin Streets between Stuart and Francis Streets.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Richardson House was the home of many prosperous Houston citizens and their families at its original location on Block 1, Lot 40 of the James S. Holman Survey of the City of Houston. Over its first 25 years, the house's occupants reflected the evolution of Houston's economy, which was first built upon the cotton trade and land development. Edward R. Richardson, a real estate dealer and cotton broker, constructed and first occupied the house. Richardson House was later the residence of Congressman Joe Henry Eagle, who helped secure funding to improve the Houston Ship Channel. As timber eclipsed cotton as Houston's primary export product, the Roderick MacDonald family, with multiple interests in timberlands and real estate, lived there.

After its relocation across Austin Street in 1926, to make room for the construction of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Richardson House was for 40 years the home of the Stiles family, who had lived on that block of Austin Street, on and off, since the Cedar Lawn Addition was originally subdivided in 1890. Magnificat Houses, Inc. purchased the house in 1971, and today it serves as a clubhouse for residents in their social services programs.

In 2001, Richardson House was determined by the Texas Historical Commission to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under the Criterion C, Local Significance in Architecture. The building also meets Criteria 1, 4, and 5 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Richardson House was originally built on Lot 40 of the survey of the City of Houston, Texas. Lot 40 lies partially in the James S. Holman Survey and mostly in the Obedience Smith Survey,¹ although deed records associated with the property consistently refer to the much larger Holman Survey and omit any reference to Smith.

Lot 40 was one of many 10-acre lots outlying Houston's downtown in the mid-1800s. Bounded by Holman Avenue, Austin Street, Elgin Street, and San Jacinto Street, Lot 40 passed through the hands of James Holman, Moseley Baker, and one-term Houston Mayor Alexander J. Burke. Publisher of the

¹ Harris County Deed Records, Vol. J, pages 389.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Houston Telegraph newspaper Edward H. Cushing built his house and gardens, called “Bohemia,” on the entire lot sometime after purchasing the property from Burke in 1862². The home was said to have been one of the first in Houston to feature elements of the Victorian style, and Cushing’s flower and vegetable gardens were extensive.³ After Cushing’s death in 1879 and that of his wife Matilda in 1881, their children likely inherited the property; their oldest surviving son, railroad manager Edward Benjamin Cushing sold Lot 40 on behalf of his younger brother, Alfred Barnes Cushing, in 1901 to Edward R. Richardson and F. B. West.⁴

Edward Randolph Richardson was the younger brother of Emma Richardson Cherry, noted Houston artist and preservationist. These adult Richardson children, along with parents Perkins and Frances Richardson, had moved to Houston in the late 1800s. Edward R. was a real estate dealer who, along with F. B. West, in August 1901 subdivided Lot 40 into six blocks known as “Cushing Park.” Block 1 is bounded by Holman, Austin, Francis and Caroline Streets; Block 2 is bounded by Francis, Austin, Stuart, and Caroline; Block 3 is bounded by Stuart, Austin, Elgin, and Caroline; Block 4 is bounded by Holman, Caroline, Francis, and San Jacinto; Block 5 is bounded by Francis, Caroline, Stuart, and San Jacinto, and Block 6 is bounded by Stuart, Caroline, Elgin, and San Jacinto.⁵

Between 1901 and 1902, Richardson and West sold Blocks 2, 4, 5, and 6; Richardson retained Block 1 for himself, buying out West’s interest in the property in 1902.⁶ Richardson in 1903 built a large Neoclassical house on Block 1, and he and his family lived there briefly before moving to Bexar County sometime after April 1904.⁷

Richardson House was, according to architectural historian Stephen Fox, “one of the first of its type to be built in Houston” and “unusual among so-called Colonial Revival houses locally because of the extent to which it replicated 18th-century architectural features, such as the pedimented ground floor windows and the corner pilasters.”⁸ This residence is one of the finest examples of Neoclassical architecture remaining in Houston, and it embodies a period in the city’s history when the Midtown area was occupied by prosperous citizens whose business enterprises reflected the many facets of Houston’s economy -- cotton shipping and processing, real estate development, the lumber trade, printing and publishing -- as well as civic involvement.

Richardson sold the property to Wadsworth Leeper in April 1904,⁹ and Leeper only a few months later conveyed it to Joe Henry Eagle¹⁰, then a Houston attorney about to launch a political career during which he would appropriate \$4,000,000 for improvements to the Houston Ship Channel and establish Ellington Air Force Base. Eagle sold Richardson House in 1908, three years prior to his first term in Congress.¹¹ The property was purchased by Houston lumberman Roderick MacDonald,¹² whose family

² Harris County Deed Records, no deed number, Vol. Z, page 76.

³ Dorothy Knox Howe Houghton, Barrie M. Scardino, Sadie Gwin Blackburn, and Katherine S. Howe. *Houston’s Forgotten Heritage: Landscapes, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1914*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press), p. 121.

⁴ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 33603, Vol. 127, page 516.

⁵ Harris County Map Records, Vol. 1, page 30.

⁶ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 38801, Vol. 133, page 362-363.

⁷ Although a city survey of historic properties speculates that Richardson might have died “soon after the house was completed,” and that inaccuracy has been reported in other publications, Richardson continued to buy and sell Houston real estate until at least 1910, and he appears on the 1920 Federal Census.

⁸ Stephen Fox, author; Nancy Hadley, ed. *Houston Architectural Guide: American Institute of Architects Houston* (Houston: Herring Press), 1990, p. 79.

⁹ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 56906, Vol. 163, page 177-178.

¹⁰ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 60087, Vol. 168, page 140-141.

¹¹ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Eagle, Joe Henry,” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/EE/fea1.html>. Accessed July 15, 2008.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

lived in the home until 1926, when it was moved from Lot 40 to make way for the construction of the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church.¹³

The house was oriented to face Austin Street, on Lot 9 and parts of Lots 8 and 10 of the Cedar Lawn Addition, which had been platted in 1890 by Mark Weiss.¹⁴ Part of Lot 39 of the Holman Survey, Cedar Lawn made up the five-acre, northwestern half of Lot 39 and was divided into 34 lots with a 20-foot alley separating the lots fronting Austin Street from those fronting La Branch Street.

Richardson House became 3307 Austin Street, replacing the house that previously stood at 3313 Austin. The parcel of land to which it was moved (Lots 8, 9, and 10) had been purchased two years earlier by sisters Gertrude W. (Stiles) Garvin and Laretta A. Stiles.¹⁵ Their mother, Kate Stiles, had purchased Lots 11 and 12 from Mark Weiss in 1890¹⁶ and the southern nine feet of Lot 10 in 1892,¹⁷ and the Stiles family had lived at that address (3317 Austin) from 1890 until 1903, and again from 1917 to 1920. Michael Dillon Stiles had moved back to 3313 Austin by 1925; after that house was demolished to make room for the relocation of Richardson House, M. D. Stiles and his wife moved several doors down to 3319 Austin for a few years, eventually moving back to 3317, where they resided through the 1930s.¹⁸

Kate Stiles and her husband Louis had purchased 1500 acres of ranch land in the Hurzar Survey in 1874 and, at the same time, a house “in town” (Block 6 of Lot 186). Louis and Kate each bought and sold property in Houston on a regular and frequent basis. By the 1890s, they were raising their family on Austin Street.¹⁹ Louis Stiles died on October 22, 1925, at the age of 80, not long before Kate and her daughters bought and moved into Richardson House.

Both Gertrude and Laretta Stiles worked for the Lone Star Oil Company as bookkeepers; Gertrude married Lone Star Oil manager David M. Garvin around 1905 and subsequently moved to La Porte, Texas, where they remained until David’s death around 1918.²⁰ Neither she nor Laretta had any children.²¹

Kate Stiles, Gertrude Garvin, and Laretta Stiles all lived in Richardson House for the remainder of their lives. Kate died in the early 1940s, Gertrude in 1954, and Laretta in 1958, with each woman passing the property to the next in line. After Laretta’s estate, administered by her niece, Mary Spencer Livingston, was settled in 1963, Livingston sold the property to Wesley W. Whitcomb.²² Whitcomb immediately contracted with the T. J. Bettes Company to “redecorate and remodel residence and office”²³ (probably the one-story addition to the rear of the home, which had from time to time been rented out). Whitcomb seems to have had financial difficulties, repeatedly “extending, renewing, and rearranging” his debt to Livingston²⁴ until, on July 6, 1971, Magnificat Houses, Inc. assumed payments

¹² Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 47183, Vol. 228, page 460.

¹³ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 235336, Vol. 656, pages 293-295.

¹⁴ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 20599, Vol. 49, page 529.

¹⁵ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 187371, Vol. 611, page 568.

¹⁶ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 29668, Vol. 63, page 375.

¹⁷ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 21799, Vol. 52, pages 625-626.

¹⁸ Houston City Directories, 1890-1932.

¹⁹ Harris County Deed Records index 1836-1903.

²⁰ Houston City Directories, 1902-1918.

²¹ Heirship Affidavit, Harris County Deed Records, film code No. 074-87-2112, 074-87-2113.

²² Harris County Clerk Records, film codes 085-08-0623 and 085-08-0626; Harris County Mortgage Records, Vol. 4358, page 465.

²³ Harris County Clerk Records, film codes 086-06-0617 and 086-06-0618.

²⁴ Harris County Mortgage Records, Vol. 6334, pages 575-576; Vol. 7445, page 418.

on Whitcomb's most recent promissory note.²⁵ The organization paid its obligation in full and received a quit claim deed on March 22, 1984;²⁶ it retains ownership of the property today.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

Richardson House is located in the Midtown area just west of downtown Houston, on the south side of Buffalo Bayou. Originally sited on Block 1 of the six-block parcel known as "Cushing Park" (Lot 40 of the James S. Holman Survey, bounded by Holman, Austin, Francis, and Caroline Streets), the house faced southwest and was accessed by curved sidewalks leading to the front entry as well as to doorways on either side of the house.²⁷ Richardson House now faces northwest, fronting Austin Street, as part of Cedar Lawn Addition (the northwest half of Lot 39).

Although no builder or architect is explicitly identified with this house, Edward Richardson's father, Perkins Richardson, was an experienced architect and builder, and it is likely that Perkins designed and oversaw the construction of Richardson House.

Perkins Richardson was born in Watertown, New York, on November 19, 1832. His father, Anar (Anor) Richardson was a carpenter and joiner. In 1845, the family moved west to Aurora, Illinois, where Perkins learned the building trade; he received his first contract, to build a stone house for an H. White in Sugar Grove, when he was 21, and went into business for himself at the age of 23. According to a local history book written in 1878, while in Aurora, Perkins Richardson "built many handsome and beautiful buildings, but it would be a useless task to mention them all; the first public building was the City Hall, and stands to-day as a monument of his skill as an architect and builder; the most substantial blocks of West Aurora were built by him." Perkins and his younger brother Russell worked as partners in construction and later briefly went into business with a sash, door, and blind factory in nearby Montgomery, Illinois, in 1869, but it was financially unsuccessful and the brothers parted ways professionally in 1874.²⁸ Perkins Richardson, his wife Frances, and his children (Emma, Edward, James, and Ruth) relocated to Crete, Saline County, Nebraska, in about 1879 and are enumerated there on the 1880 Federal Census. Emma later taught art at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln before studying art in Paris, France.²⁹

The Richardsons' oldest child, Emma Richardson Cherry, and her husband Dillon B. Cherry, had relocated to Houston from Denver in 1892 or 1893,³⁰ and Perkins, Frances, and Ruth apparently moved to Houston with Edward and Belle Richardson around the same time. Perkins first appears in the 1894-1895 Houston City Directory, where he is listed as an "architect, builder" and Edward as a real estate dealer; the family (Perkins and Frances, Edward and Belle, and Ruth) lived at 710 Hadley at the corner of Louisiana Street. The following year, Perkins retired; he and Frances bought a home at 2609 Main Street (Lot 8, Block 6 of the Texas Savings and Real Estate Investment Association Addition)³¹ from Edward, where the entire family resided for several years. (By then, Ruth Richardson had become the society editor of the *Houston Post*.) In 1904, only a year after Richardson House was built, Edward and Belle moved to Bexar County, Texas, and Perkins and Frances moved into the home of Emma and

²⁵ Harris County Mortgage Records, Vol. 8495, page 339.

²⁶ Harris County Clerk Records, film code 096-91-0535.

²⁷ Houghton, et al. *Houston's Forgotten Heritage*, 167.

²⁸ *The Past and Present of Kane County, Illinois* (Chicago: William Le Baron Jr. & Co.), 1878, p. 788-789.

²⁹ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Cherry, Emma Richardson," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fch24.html> (accessed July 13, 2008).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Harris County Deed Records, Deed No. 11116, Vol. 96, page 14.

Dillon Cherry, at the northwest corner of Fargo, Hopkins, and Fairview. Perkins died on February 8, 1907, and Frances followed on November 26, 1907.

Today, Richardson House sits on a flat site at 3307 Austin Street, facing northwest, on Lot 9 and parts of Lots 8 and 10 of Cedar Lawn Addition subdivision. An enclosed garden known as Brennan Park extends southwest and encompasses Cedar Lawn Lots 11-17. A metal fence, erected in 1995, surrounds the entire property (house and park). A gate directly in front of the house's main entry provides access via a long tile and brick walkway and brick steps that ascend to the front porch.

The Richardson House is Neoclassical in style, with Adamesque details and elaborations. The foundation is brick, and the house is framed and sided in wood, painted a uniform white. The central portion of the roof is hipped, with a balustrade at the center of the roof. The front porch gable, rear wing roof, and side dormers project from the central roof profile.

The main façade, on the northwest side of the house, is highly symmetrical and is dominated by a full-height entry porch. The porch roof is supported by fluted wood columns with Ionic capitals. The pediment above the porch features dentils beneath its raking cornice and an oval, Adamesque window at its center.

At the center of the porch, the entry door is flanked by sidelights and topped by an elliptical fanlight with a pediment above – additional Adamesque details. At the center of the second story of the front façade, beneath the roof of the porch, an elliptical balcony with a low balustrade projects over the entrance. Palladian windows open onto this balcony.

On the first story of the front façade, flanking the entry door, diamond-paned French windows open onto the front porch. (The diamond-pattern of the glazing is unusual for a Neoclassical house, and would more typically be found on Tudor-style houses of the same period.) These windows, as well as the two additional sash windows at opposite sides of the front façade, are topped by dentiled, triangular pediments. The two sash windows on the first story and four on the second story have twelve-pane upper sashes and single-pane lower sashes. Pilasters at the corners of the front façade rise to a dentiled cornice that extends around the front porch as well as around the sides of the house.

The southwest façade of the house is dominated by a semi-circular bay with an open porch on the first story. Tiered, fluted columns with ionic capitals surround each story of the bay. Low balustrades curve around the porch and around the base of the second story. Two doors lead inside from the left side of the porch, and to the right of these doors is a series of three sixteen-paned windows. The second story, once also an open porch, is now enclosed by single pane windows that wrap around the perimeter of the bay. Beyond the flat roof of the bay is a dormer that rises above the main roofline. The dormer has a projecting, dentiled pediment above two windows, both now boarded over.

A brick chimney is located to the left of the porch bay, and between this chimney and the front corner of the house are two twelve-over-one sash windows, one on each story. To the right of the porch bay are two more twelve-over-one sash windows. Here the symmetry of the southwest façade ends: the house steps back twice to the rear and, as it steps back the second time, rises to three stories. On the second and third stories of the rear portion of the house, sash windows in a variety of sizes and shapes are found.

On the southeast corner, the form of the original house is obscured by a one-story addition. This addition features three pairs of French doors that open onto brick steps; the steps are partially covered by a roof that extends over the center set of doors and is supported by square columns.

The dominant feature of the Richardson House's northeast façade is a porte-cochere that extends from the center of the façade. The flat roof of the porte-cochere is supported by two fluted columns; both had ionic capitals, but the capital at the rear of the porte-cochere has been replaced with wood blocks. The columns rest on a brick base that rises to the same height as the brick stairs to the side entrance off the porte-cochere. The entrance features a door with diamond-paned glass, with diamond-paned sidelights. The porte-cochere is topped by a balustrade, and on the second story, a tripartite window overlooks the roof of the porte-cochere. Above the second story, another dormer mirrors the one on the southwest façade; it, too, has a projecting, dentiled pediment and boarded windows.

To the right of the porte-cochere on the northeast façade, two diamond-paned casement windows flank a brick chimney that is in line with the chimney on the southwest façade. Above the casement windows, on the second story, are two twelve-over-one sash windows.

To the left of the porte-cochere, towards the rear of the house, are several, asymmetrically arranged, nine-over-one sash windows. As on the opposite façade, the house steps back and rises to three stories, and on this section of the house there are a variety of window types and sizes, located irregularly.

At the northeast corner, the house is connected to a flat-roofed, two-bay garage built of rusticated concrete block. The one-story passage leading from the house to the garage is sided in wood, has a flat roof, and has two closely spaced, eight-over-one sash windows.

At the rear of the Richardson House, a fire escape, built of concrete with metal railings, climbs the full height of the house's three stories. Beneath the fire escape there is an additional, rear entrance to the house. Sash windows predominate on the rear façade and are arranged irregularly.

Richardson House today bears remarkable similarity to its appearance in pre-1926 historic photos. In its original location, all of the home's windows were flanked by working shutters, including full-length shutters on the two French windows to either side of the main entry. The other architectural details, with the exception of the additions made after the home was moved in 1926, appear to remain almost entirely intact more than 100 years after its construction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

This application was researched and written by Steph McDougal, principal, McDoux Preservation LLC, with the exception of the architectural description, which was prepared by Dana Serovy, Project Design Assistant, Main Street Program, Texas Historical Commission. Thomas McWhorter, Preservation Planner, City of Houston, supplied historical information about Richardson House, and biographical information about Perkins Richardson was provided by Jan Mangers, Director, Aurora Preservation Commission, Aurora, Illinois, and her staff.

_____. *The Past and Present of Kane County, Illinois* (Chicago: William Le Baron Jr. & Co.), 1878.

Fox, Stephen; Nancy Hadley, ed. *Houston Architectural Guide: American Institute of Architects Houston* (Houston: Herring Press), 1990.

Harris County Deed Records, Mortgage Records, and Map Records.

Handbook of Texas Online, s.v., "Cherry, Emma Richardson,"

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fch24.html> (accessed July 13, 2008).

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CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Houghton, Dorothy Knox Howe; Barrie M. Scardino; Sadie Gwin Blackburn; and Katherine S. Howe. *Houston’s Forgotten Heritage: Landscapes, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1914*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press).

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);
- (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

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

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 Historic Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Richardson House at 3307 Austin Street.

SITE LOCATION MAP
RICHARDSON HOUSE
ORIGINAL LOCATION: 1311 HOLMAN AVENUE
PRESENT LOCATION: 3307 AUSTIN STREET
NOT TO SCALE

