

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Shaw House  
**OWNERS:** Perry and Rebecca Nolen  
**APPLICANTS:** Same  
**LOCATION:** 2912 Helena Street  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** V.a  
**HPO FILE NO:** 09L225  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Aug-4-09  
**HAHC HEARING:** Jan-14-09  
**PC HEARING:** Jan-21-09

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 3, Block 4, Fairgrounds Addition Section 3, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a single story, wood-frame, single-family residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Shaw House is one of the best remaining examples of the original architectural development of the Fairgrounds Addition neighborhood, and represents an important chapter in the story of how housing developed in Houston. The Fairgrounds Addition was named for the short-lived state fair grounds in Houston, which covered 93 acres southwest of downtown in the 1870s. In the late 1880s, single family houses were the prevalent type of dwelling in Houston, and the area was platted and sold as lots for single-family frame dwellings, mostly of Victorian design. By the 1920s, many of these original houses had been demolished to make room for Houston's first apartment buildings.

The Queen Anne-style house at 2912 Helena was built by Abraham Shaw for his family circa 1905. Descendants of the family were to retain ownership of the house until the 1980s. Now largely surrounded by vacant land and new construction, the Shaw House is a rare survivor of the neighborhood's earliest period of development. The Shaw House meets Criteria 1, 4, and 5 for Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *The Shaw Family*

The original owners of the Shaw House were a modest, working-class family. Abraham L. Shaw was born in November 1865 in Michigan. Over his lifetime he held a variety of occupations including traveling salesman,<sup>1</sup> bookkeeper at a shoe company,<sup>2</sup> oil company employee,<sup>3</sup> and real estate agent.<sup>4</sup> His wife, Effie Virginia Shaw was born Effie Smith in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 8, 1873. She worked as a housewife for most of her life.<sup>5</sup> She died in Houston at Brannon's Nursing Home (2405 Riverside) on August 27, 1962, of "terminal pneumonia," a complication of chronic hepatitis. She was buried on

<sup>1</sup> 1900 U. S. Federal Census; 1905-1906 Houston City Directory

<sup>2</sup> 1910 U. S. Federal Census

<sup>3</sup> 1920 U. S. Federal Census

<sup>4</sup> 1930 U. S. Federal Census

<sup>5</sup> U. S. Federal Census: 1900; 1910; 1920; 1930

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August 29, 1962, at South Park Cemetery, Houston. Abraham and Effie moved to Houston between 1899 and 1900 and resided in downtown Houston on Louisiana Street for a few years.<sup>6</sup> Abraham and Effie had two daughters, Rachel Gladys and Fannie Marie. Rachel Gladys was born in September 1899 in Missouri and Fannie Marie was born in approximately 1908 in Texas.<sup>7</sup> The Shaw family moved into the house at 2912 Helena Street in 1905. Abraham built the house next door, 2912-A Helena Street, in 1920 and gave it to Marie as a wedding gift. Marie Shaw Crider lived in the house at 2912-A Helena Street until her death in 1999. The Shaw family owned the house at 2912 Helena Street until 1984.

### *Fairgrounds Addition*<sup>8</sup>

Fairgrounds Addition was platted in 1889 and was Houston's earliest suburban neighborhood. It was located in a part of Houston called the South End, because it was situated just south of Downtown. At the time of its development, the area was prairie where cattle roamed and farms flourished. In 1873, a street car line laid its track to the entrance of the grounds at McGowen and Travis. From the early to mid-1870s, this area of Houston was the location of the important, but short-lived, 93-acre Fair Grounds, which is where the old state fairgrounds was relocated, in 1872, from its original site at the Macatee Wagon Yard near the Southern Pacific Depot, located at the present day Sesquicentennial Park in downtown Houston. Although the Fair Grounds went bankrupt in the mid-1870s, it was not until the late 1880s that the Fair Grounds Addition was created, platted, and sold by the Galveston and Houston Investment Company as lots for single-family frame dwellings, mostly of Victorian design.

Bettie Bryan is referred to as the "mother" of the Fairgrounds Addition. Bryan was the founder of the L. Bryan & Company real estate company. The growth and prosperity of Houston was due largely to its pioneer real estate companies and one such company was L. Bryan & Company. In addition to the Fairgrounds Addition, Bryan was responsible for many other additions to Houston, which were developed largely by her efforts. L. Bryan & Company's activity extended to the development of the agricultural lands to Houston and in other parts of Texas. The firm was composed of Bettie Bryan, her son Louis Bryan, and F. P. Eastburn, all of whom were well known in business, social, financial and fraternal circles of the city. Bettie and Louis Bryan were members of an old pioneer family of the same name, which is inseparably connected with the early history of Texas.<sup>9</sup>

The Fairground Third Addition, the location of the Shaw House, was subdivided by Stella G. Carr and husband J.O. Carr on November 24, 1900. It is 4.71 acres of land out of Lot 28 and 31 of the Obedience Smith Survey.<sup>10</sup> Stella was an "active member" of the Houston Philharmonic.

Until the end of the 19th century, Houstonians lived primarily in large, single-family houses on sizeable lots. Land was so plentiful and inexpensive in Houston that dwellings with common walls, which were common in other cities, did not occur here until after the turn of the century. At the turn of the century, Houston was growing at an unprecedented rate. The devastation of Galveston by the hurricane of 1900, and the discovery of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont, four months later, ensured Houston's future as a major trading and business center. Because of the escalating prices of urban real estate, Houston

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<sup>6</sup> 1900 U. S. Federal Census

<sup>7</sup> Owner research

<sup>8</sup> Avondale Association

<sup>9</sup> Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Greater Houston

<sup>10</sup> Fair Grounds, 3<sup>rd</sup> Addition Plat #30983. Recorded 11-28-1900.

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builders began to construct higher density housing. It is believed that in 1899 Houston's first apartment building was completed, and by 1910 the city had nineteen such buildings.

By the 1920s, this new higher density housing was introduced into the South End. These low-rise "second generation" brick apartments began to replace many of the "first generation" wood-frame, single-family houses built earlier in the South End. This type of multi-family dwelling, or apartment building, also was constructed to a lesser degree on undeveloped lots and as "in-fill" in the adjacent neighborhoods of Montrose and Westmoreland.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Shaw House was constructed in 1905 by the original owner, Abraham L. Shaw. The house is a one-story, asymmetrical, wood frame home which retains a high level of architectural integrity. The wood frame house rests on a pier and beam foundation and is clad with shiplap siding. The house was designed in the Queen Anne cottage style and features a partial-width porch. The porch supports are full height, classical columns and the railing is composed of simple wood. The house retains the original seven foot, double hung wood sash windows with 2/2 glass lites. The windows are flanked by louvered-style shutters. The house features a steeply pitched, combination hipped and gable roof with a prominent forward facing intersecting gable. The intersecting gable features a cut glass insert and is enclosed by a pent roof. The entire roof is clad with plain shingles. The front gable features brackets and retains some of the original cedar shingles on its facade. The roof structure was once punctuated by two slope chimneys which have been lost over time. The front entrance features a paneled, solid wood door, inset with cut glass, and topped with a glass transom.

The house was restored over many years. The previous owners removed the rotted cedar shingles which covered the entire house and replaced it with shiplap siding. They retained the original clapboard when they added the front porch. The front porch was recreated using old photos as reference. The siding and front porch were repaired and restored in 2009 by the current owners.

The Queen Anne style was the dominant style of housing in the United States from 1880 through 1900. The style was spread throughout the country by pattern books and the first architectural magazine, *The American Architect and Building News*. The style was most popular in the southern and western parts of the country, with California and the South having the most elaborate examples. The Queen Anne had an asymmetrical floor plan; steeply pitched roof of irregular shape, usually with a dominant front-facing gable; textured shingles, siding, or other device to avoid a smooth-walled appearance; and a partial or full-width porch, usually one story high. The Queen Anne cottage is a one-story house that has restrained Queen Anne massing and details.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>11</sup> McAlester, 1994.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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McAlester, Virginia and Lee, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

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<http://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/20752/wrcPenHo.xml?sequence=1>. Accessed December 15, 2009.

U. S. Federal Census, 1900.

U. S. Federal Census, 1910.

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U. S. Federal Census, 1930.

## APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the 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:

- | <b>S</b>                            | <b>NA</b>                           |   | <b>S - satisfies</b> | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> | <b>NA - not applicable</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (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; |                      |                             |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;  |                      |                             |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; |                      |                             |                            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (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;   |                      |                             |                            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | (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;                                    |                      |                             |                            |

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- (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.

### 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 Shaw House at 2912 Helena Street.

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EXHIBIT A  
SHAW HOUSE  
2912 HELENA STREET



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**EXHIBIT B**  
**SITE LOCATION MAP**  
SHAW HOUSE  
2912 HELENA STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

