

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Francois and Marie Tajan House

OWNERS: Salvador and Ann Guercio

APPLICANTS: Charles Stava for Salvador and Ann Guercio

LOCATION: 1801 Lubbock Street (formerly 615-617 Sabine Street)
– Old Sixth Ward Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: IV.b

HPO FILE NO: 09PL77

DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-20-09

HAHC HEARING: Feb-12-09

PC HEARING: Feb-19-09

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 17, Block 441, W. R. Baker Subdivision, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The house was moved to this site from its original location across Sabine Street at 1717 Lubbock Street, Lot 18 and the west 2 ft of Lot 17, Block 454, W. R. Baker Subdivision, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, in 2006. The building on the site is a one-story, wood frame L-plan residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Francois and Marie Tajan House, at 1801 Lubbock Street, is located within the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District. The neighborhood was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 23, 1978, and was designated as a city historic district on June 25, 1998, and protected historic district on August 1, 2007. The Old Sixth Ward Historic District has the largest concentration of Victorian-era buildings in Houston, the majority of which were built in the 1870s through 1890s.

Built in 1887, the Francois and Marie Tajan House was considered unusual for its time, because it featured a progressive floor plan which includes features more commonly found in homes built a decade later, such as wainscoting, integral closets, and beveled, wood siding that was not used on houses constructed during the same time. After its relocation across the street, to 1801 Lubbock Street, in 2006, the Tajan House was intensively restored.

The Francois and Marie Tajan House at 1801 Lubbock Street meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5, and was built before 1905 and is listed as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places, all considerations for Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Old Sixth Ward

Home to approximately 2,000 Houstonians, the area now called Old Sixth Ward was originally part of a two-league Mexican land grant made in 1824 to Stephen F. Austin’s son, John. On July 6, 1838, two years after John K., Augustus C. and Charlotte B. Allen founded the town of Houston, S.P. Hollingsworth filed a survey of the area in which he divided the land into large, narrow tracts that ran northward from Buffalo Bayou. By January 1839, portions of the Hollingsworth survey that lay in the future Old Sixth Ward had been conveyed to several prominent Houstonians, including: W. R. Baker, James S. Holman, Nathan Kempton and Henry Allen. By 1858, W. R. Baker and his friends owned or

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held mortgages on most of the land in this area. Baker engaged the County Surveyor, Samuel West, to restructure his holdings by converting the whole area into a lot and block system. The new survey was laid out to true north, varying from downtown, which was platted at a 45-degree angle to true north. The first Salvadore after the re-platting took place on January 31, 1859, when Baker transferred several blocks to W.W. Leeland. Subsequent lot and block Salvadores followed Baker's plat, which remains in use today. For many years, W.R. Baker served as President of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad whose route approached Houston from the northwest. The railroad's success greatly influenced the growth of the neighborhood, which attracted immigrants seeking employment. Long noted for its ethnic and economic diversity, the neighborhood has at various times been home to Swedish, German, English, Irish, French, Swiss, Italian, Polish, Eastern European, Jewish, African, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexican, Latin American, and Scottish immigrants. The 1870 census indicates that everyone who lived in this area worked either for the railroad or in a related enterprise such as construction or retail services.

In 1871, Glenwood Cemetery opened at the western edge of the area. It provided a natural, protective boundary that continues in force today. In 1872, Washington Avenue was graded and the number of businesses located there increased. By 1878, the Houston Street Railway (trolley) extended to Washington Avenue where the business district was known as "Uptown" in contrast to the Market Square area, which was known as "Downtown." A bird's eye view of the area drawn in the early 1890s shows the neighborhood to have been fully developed with a structure on almost every lot. By the early 1900s, the Sixth Ward was a fully developed community complete with a fire station, a public school, stores, Salvadoroons, churches and industrial establishments.

The Houston Chronicle newspaper lauded Fourth Ward North, as Sixth Ward was originally called, as one of the finest and 'healthful' places to live in Houston. The area enjoyed the highest elevation in Houston and abundant artesian water, fed by the Beauchamp Springs. Its residents enjoyed proximity to downtown and other attractions such as the popular Highland Park resort at the corner of Houston Avenue and White Oak Drive that had excellent swimming and boating facilities. So popular was Fourth Ward North, the Chronicle ran a weekly section on it for several years.

The majority of the houses standing in Old Sixth Ward today were built in the 1870s through 1890s as modest, one-story frame cottages occupied by single families. During the 1880s, the majority of the families living in the neighborhood were of German descent. Many of those families lived on farms in the country in northwest Houston where the Spring Branch, Rosslyn, Timbergrove, and Oak Forest subdivision now stand and in keeping with German tradition, they built houses in Sixth Ward as "town homes". They would use these houses while selling their farm produce at the city market downtown, their annual shopping, socializing, and/or attending theatres or opera houses downtown. They used timber from their farms to build these houses. During the late 19th Century, more than half of the houses were owner-occupied. The distinctive Victorian character of these dwellings was enhanced by decorative millwork usually applied to the front porches. As the 20th Century progressed, new housing reflected changes in architectural styles. Bungalows were built among the Victorian cottages, but the essential character of the neighborhood did not change. During World War II, many of the original owners had moved on and their houses were converted from single to multi-family tenant dwellings, often owned by absentee landlords. Since achieving recognition as both a nationally and a locally designated historic district, the Old Sixth Ward has witnessed the restoration of many homes to single-family occupancy. Today's Sixth Ward is often described by visiting Historians as a small village in the shadow of downtown Houston. The Old Sixth Ward is a complete community with historic churches, corner stores, and even a school and cemetery.

Francois and Marie Tajan

The Frank and Marie Tajan House was built in 1887 at its original location, 1717 Lubbock Street, by Francois and Marie Tajan after they relocated to Houston from Galveston. Francois Tajan was a native of Pont-a-Mousson, France. His wife, Marie Louise, was the daughter of Marie and Louis Varenne who emigrated to Galveston from Montmerie, France. Beginning in 1885, Louis Varenne purchased several lots on Blocks 454, 455, 440, and 441 of the W. R. Baker, NSBB Survey, for speculative purposes and worked with his son-in-law, Francois Tajan, to improve upon them for investment income. Francois Tajan listed his profession both as a real estate manager and/or dealer. He suffered a serious illness while living in Galveston which resulted in the amputation of one of his legs.

Francois and Marie Tajan had five children – Louis Varenne (born 1874), Joseph (born 1875), Marie (born 1878), Eugene Henry (born 1881), and Louise Jeanne (born 1899). After the death of Marie Tajan in 1918, the oldest Tajan daughter, Marie Railey, moved back into the house with her family, presumably to care for her ailing father. After Francois Tajan's death in 1922, the house was sold to settle his estate and the majority of the children were living in Eastwood. Son, Joseph Tajan, lived at 4619 Walker Street with his family and his brother, Eugene Henry, lived at 4417 Walker Street.

The house was later sold to William Hutton, of 1920 Kane Street. Mr. Hutton was a landowner who owned several rental properties in the neighborhood. During the Hutton's tenure, the house was converted into a duplex and leased to a succession of tenants until 2004 when Mr. Hutton's grandson, Richard, passed away. The house was then sold to Mr. David Loftus who intended to demolish the home and use the land as a parking lot to service the municipal courthouse three blocks away. He agreed to donate the house to Bart Truxillo with the agreement that it be relocated to another site. A descendant of the Crappito and Santopolo families, Salvador Guercio and his wife Ann, purchased the home after it was relocated to 1801 Lubbock Street. The Guercios currently live on State Street directly behind the original site of the Tajan House at 1717 Lubbock Street.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Frank Tajan House was built in 1887 and is classified as an L-plan, Italianate style cottage. The house was deemed as "contributing" on the Old Sixth Ward Historic District inventory. The house was considered unusual for its time because it featured a progressive floor plan with elements more commonly found in homes built a decade later such as wainscoting, integral closets, and beveled, wood siding that was not used on many historic houses. An unusual characteristic of the floor plan is a large parlor located in the rear wing as opposed to the front, like most of the houses in the Old Sixth Ward. After the turn of the last century, the attic was finished to feature an additional bedroom, perhaps to accommodate the elder Tajan sons.

The house was relocated to 1801 Lubbock Street, at the Southwest corner of Sabine and Lubbock Streets, in March 2007. A certificate of appropriateness to move the historic house in order to prevent its demolition was granted by the HAHC on July 13, 2006. Prior to the move, the roof structure was dismantled in order to clear low lying telecommunication and power wires. The house was moved to the vacant lot at the southwest corner of Lubbock and Sabine Street, where it was placed on a raised pier and beam foundation.

After its relocation, Salvador and Ann Guercio intensively restored The Tajan House. On April 25, 2007, a certificate of appropriateness was granted by the HAHC and the following work was completed:

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- Reconstructed the original cross gabled roof as original to front of house; Front portion of roof is the same height and pitch as original; Roof gables facing Lubbock and Sabine streets were reconstructed as original.
- Reconstructed rear roof at point of intersecting roof ridges; Roof ridge south of intersecting roof ridge was raised to facilitate the construction of additional living space in the former attic area to the rear of the house; New roof ridge, which is parallel to Sabine Street was raised an additional 3'-9 3/8" higher than the historic roof ridge beginning at the point of intersection with perpendicular roof ridge at point of intersection, but which blends with the original portion of roof via a hipped roof connection of the same pitch as the original; Roof ridge was extended southward toward State Street to encompass an early 20th century bathroom addition which was appended on to the rear of the house and which formerly had a hipped roof which abutted the wood siding of the rear of the structure below the roof eaves.
- North Elevation: North Elevation, which is the historic primary façade, was restored to original. Door and window configuration remained unchanged; Restored porch floor, door, windows, columns, siding, balustrade, and trim board; North elevation remains unchanged with exception of intersecting roof ridge which now ties into historic roof at central axis and which was raised an additional 3'-9 3/8" higher than the roof ridge which is parallel to Lubbock Street. The raised portion of the roof ridge behind the ridge parallel to Lubbock now incorporates within it additional second floor living space.
- East Elevation: The roof ridge, which is parallel to Sabine Street, was raised at the southern point of intersection with the cross gabled roof ridge which is parallel to Lubbock Street. Constructed a new gable end over original side facing porch which formerly featured one dormer window. Side facing gable addition now intersects with raised roof ridge located behind it at the same height; Gable now features paired two over two light wood sash windows with trim and cap rail to match those found elsewhere on the historic house; Gable was clad in horizontal Hardie simulated 105 siding and trim board to match historic house; Removed two windows on first floor which face side porch and replaced with two pairs of paneled wood doors with glass transom above each door opening.
- South Elevation: Raised and extended roof ridge which is oriented north to south towards State Street. Roof ridge was raised 3'-9 3/8" and was extended south to cover an early 20th century bathroom addition at the southernmost end of the house; The historic dormer window, which was dismantled when the entire roof structure was removed was rebuilt/relocated to face south from rear of roof ridge which faces Lubbock Street; Added new window opening to south side of original first floor bedroom which is an original location; Replaced existing small window in east "L" with matching two over two pane wood sash window as used elsewhere in historic house; Extended existing gable roof over east facing porch to allow for more living space; All siding on the south facing surfaces was carefully removed to allow for replacement on street facing north and west elevations.

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.

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 D - does not satisfy 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;
- (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.

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);

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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 Houston 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 Francois and Marie Tajan House at 1801 Lubbock Street.

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EXHIBIT A
FRANCOIS AND MARIE TAJAN HOUSE
1801 LUBBOCK STREET



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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
FRANCOIS AND MARIE TAJAN HOUSE
1801 LUBBOCK STREET
NOT TO SCALE

