

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: House at 1505-1507 Cushing Street
OWNERS: Mt. Horeb Missionary Baptist Church
APPLICANTS: Same
LOCATION: 1505-1507 Cushing Street - Freedmen's Town
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: VI.e
HPO FILE NO: 10PL97
DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-1-2010
HAHC HEARING: Jul-15-2010
PC HEARING: Jul-22-2010

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 5, Block 58, W.R. Baker SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story, wood frame duplex.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation.

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The house at 1505-1507 Cushing Street was constructed circa 1925 as rental property for Gaspare Candela and his wife. The house is located in Freedmen's Town which was listed as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. Freedmen's Town is one of Houston's most important African-American historic communities; it was the city's first black settlement following the Civil War and emancipation. The vernacular architecture of the house is associated with Afro-American settlement in the South, with origins in Louisiana. It was a popular house form, because it was relatively cheap, simple to construct, and easy to move if the occasion or need arose. The house at 1505-1507 Cushing Street is a visible reminder of the development of Freedmen's Town; it exemplifies African-American vernacular architecture in Houston and is one of the few remaining examples of vernacular architecture of one of Houston's most important African-American historic communities.

The House at 1505-1507 Cushing Street meets Criteria 1, 3-5, and 8 and is a contributing structure to the Freedmen's Town National Register Historic District, all of which are considerations for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The one-story, wood duplex bungalow at 1505-1507 Cushing Street is situated within the historic neighborhood of Freedmen's Town, just west of downtown Houston. The house was constructed circa 1925 as rental property for Gaspare Candela and his wife. Mr. Candela, a resident of the community, was a grocer and realtor and owned several properties in Freedmen's Town.

The architecture of the cottage at 1505-1507 Cushing Street is associated with Afro-American settlement in the South, with origins in Louisiana. It was an especially popular house form, because it was relatively cheap, simple to construct, and easy to move if the occasion or need arose. The houses represented a sense of community, unity, and closeness with others, for they housed entire families in tiny, cramped spaces. Also, with limited opportunities for economic and political mobility, some African Americans remained behind in the only housing available to them; many houses were home to three or four generations of African-American families.

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Freedmen's Town

Freedmen's Town, situated just west of downtown, is one of Houston's most important African-American historic communities; it was the city's first African-American settlement following the Civil War and emancipation. For the record, this community, located south of the original site, was not completely African-American. However, as this particular community developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it eventually became a model for other black communities in the city and was considered the "Mother Ward" for black Houston.

As early as 1866, residential structures in this community can be seen on W.E. Wood's map located on the following unnamed streets at the time: San Felipe, (later West Dallas), Robin and Andrews Streets between Buckner and Gillette Streets. There were African-American owners of modest to substantial-sized residences who were prominent leaders of the community such as ministers, doctors, educators, attorneys, craftsmen and small business persons. However, the majority of the residences in the community consisted of rental houses constructed as shotguns, (single and double), two-story tenements and small wood frame houses erected by absentee land owners. Later, maps, city directories and deed records would reveal most of the construction in the community took place between 1900, 1930 or 1935.

Eventually, the gradual concentration and unusual repetition of common housing types and their placement on the narrow streets of the Freedmen's Town neighborhood grew to represent an early twentieth century urban environment unique in Texas. Clarksville, in east Austin, Texas was the only other early African-American neighborhood in the state which represented a more rural community similar to Freedmen's Town in the late nineteenth century. Clarksville was placed on the National Register in 1976.

In 1984, the Freedmen's Town community was listed as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places. The Freedmen's Town historic district is composed of 580 predominantly residential structures occupying forty city blocks. Of 567 buildings in the district, 530 were identified as contributing structures. The cottage 1505-1507 Cushing Street is classified as a "contributing" structure of medium significance on the 1984 National Register Historic District inventory and is one of the few remaining examples of vernacular architecture in the community.

Over the years unexplained fires, along with inappropriate alterations and demolitions of historic structures have resulted in a loss of the community's African-American architectural fabric. Today, interspersed among the approximately 100 remaining historic structures are large concentrations of high-density residential units, composed of tin, brick, stucco and wood, none of which reflect the community's original and unique architectural heritage.

The cottage at 1505-1507 Cushing Street is currently owned by the Mt. Horeb Baptist Church congregation who purchased it in 1996. The church, also located in Freedmen's Town, is a member of the Coalition of Pastoral Leaders of Freedmen's Town Houston. The Coalition is a cluster of ten historic congregations whose mission is to provide spiritual leadership and support as a foundation for the restoration of historic Freedmen's Town. The Coalition envision a restored, healed community where God is present and His presence is recognized within an atmosphere of unity, wholeness and respect; exemplified and encouraged by church leadership.

The Coalition of Pastoral Leaders of Freedmen's Town's overarching goals are extrapolated from Isaiah Chapter 58 and are as follows:

- Those from among the community shall rebuild what has been ruined;
- The age-old foundations shall be re-established;
- Broken places and broken lives shall be repaired;
- The community shall be restored for families to live in.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The house at 1505-1507 Cushing Street was constructed circa 1925. It is a one-story, wood duplex bungalow, featuring four bays and street facing gable roof. It has symmetrical front porches with subsidiary gabled hoods supported on wood posts located at each end of street front; alongside them are a pair of sash windows lighting the front room of each dwelling. A rectangular vent opening is centered beneath the roof gable; it is trimmed with wood similar in detail to the first-floor windows heads, jambs, and sills.

The bungalow at 1505-1507 Cushing Street is classified as a “contributing” structure of medium significance on the 1984 National Register of Historic Places inventory and is one of the few remaining examples of vernacular architecture in the community.

It must be noted that 1505-1507 Cushing is misidentified as “1413” Cushing on the National Register of Historic Places Nomination form.

The cottage at 1505-1507 Cushing Street is the subject of a Neighborhood Protection order dated March 19, 2010 to “repair or demolish it on site in 90 days.” During the site visit the building was cited as:

- Dilapidated
- Substandard or unfit for human habitation
- A hazard to the health safety or welfare of its occupants (of which there are none)
- A dangerous building within the terms of Section 10-361 of the Code of Ordinances

Though the Neighborhood Protection citation report looms overhead, the church has faith the cottage can be restored. The Rutherford B. H. Yates home, now a museum house, was also on the city’s demolition list in the 1990s. It was saved in 1995 and funds were raised to restore it. Mt. Horeb is currently seeking requests from various funders to restore this historic cottage and plans to request an extension of the Neighborhood Protection order.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harris County Deed Records.

Houston City Directories, 1910-1964.

U.S. Census Records, 1880- 1930 (Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com>.)

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Houston, Texas - 1907, 1924 and 1934.

Bracey's Block Book Maps of the City of Houston, 1919, 1929, 1942, 1946, 1950 and 1953.

Harris County Building and Land Assessments.

1984 U.S. Department of the Interior, NPS Application for the Freedmen's Town Community.

E-mails from Stephen Fox, Adjunct Lecturer on Architecture at Rice University.

Scott, Emmett J., *The Red Book of Texas; A Compendium of Social , Professional, Religious, Educational and Industrial Interests of Houston's Colored Population*, Houston: Soltex Publishing Company, 1915.

E-mails from Janet K. Wagner, local historian and landscape architect.

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 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;

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- (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));

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

Accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the House at 1505-1507 Cushing Street.

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EXHIBIT A HOUSE AT 1505-1507 CUSHING STREET



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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
HOUSE AT 1505-1507 CUSHING STREET
NOT TO SCALE

